

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee 4 October 2017
AUTHOR/S: Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development

Application Number: S/2407/17/DC

Parish(es): Longstanton and Oakington

Proposal: Discharge of Condition 9 (Design Code) pursuant to Planning Permission S/2011/14/OL: Outline planning permission for phase 2 of Northstowe with details of appearance, landscaping, layout, scale and access reserved (save for the matters submitted in respect of the Southern Access Road (West)) comprising:
1) development of the main Phase 2 development area for up to 3,500 dwellings, two primary schools, secondary school, town centre including employment uses, formal and informal recreational space and landscaped areas, eastern sports hub, remainder of the western sports hub (to complete the provision delivered at Phase 1), busway, a primary road to link to the southern access, construction haul route, engineering and infrastructure works; and
2) construction of a highway link (Southern Access Road (West)) between the proposed new town of Northstowe and the B1050, improvements to the B1050, and associated landscaping and drainage.

Site address: Land to the East of B1050 and Longstanton, West of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway (CGB) and North of Oakington

Applicant(s): Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

Recommendation: Approve

Key material considerations: Design, Residential Amenity (including Noise, Air Quality, Odour and Visual Impacts), Transport and Traffic, Sustainability, Ecology and Landscape.

Committee Site Visit: Not required

Presenting Officer: James Stone, Principal Planning Officer

Application brought to Committee because: The Code is of strategic significance in guiding the second phase of Northstowe.

Date on which application received: 6 July 2017

Executive Summary

1. The Design Code for Northstowe is a comprehensive technical document that will provide developers, architects and designers a framework for establishing key design led principles for the new town of Northstowe. The submitted document, as amended, sets out both strategic level town wide principles and, in more detail, the requirements for the design of the built and landscaped areas within the phase 2 application site itself. The production of the Design Code has been a collaborative process, prepared by the HCA as the promoters for the second phase of Northstowe, with dialogue and comment from the authorities South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridgeshire County Council's with the Phase 1 master developer (Gallagher), the public, and the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel.
2. The Design Code is set out in four parts:
 - a. Part 1 provides an introduction to the document, its context and vision for Northstowe
 - b. Part 2 sets out the town wide coding that will apply across all phases of development
 - c. Part 3 considers the characteristics of the various character areas
 - d. Part 4 focuses on other detailed design aspects of the Phase 2 site.

Planning History

3. On 9 January 2017 Outline planning permission was granted for phase 2 of Northstowe with details of appearance, landscaping, layout, scale and access reserved (save for the matters submitted in respect of the Southern Access Road (West)) comprising: 1) development of the main Phase 2 development area for up to 3,500 dwellings, two primary schools, secondary school, town centre including employment uses, formal and informal recreational space and landscaped areas, eastern sports hub, remainder of the western sports hub (to complete the provision delivered at Phase 1), busway, a primary road to link to the southern access, construction haul route, engineering and infrastructure works; and 2) construction of a highway link (Southern Access Road (West)) between the proposed new town of Northstowe and the B1050, improvements to the B1050, and associated landscaping and drainage.
4. A non material amendment to the Parameter Plans was approved on 10 August 2017 under ref: S/2435/17/NM. Their amendment involved the following:
 - Reconfigured Education Campus boundary;
 - Relocated and additional swales;
 - Amendments to greenways to allow the provision of village greens;
 - Provision of new and amended green spaces including two neighbourhood village greens;
 - Relocated LEAP and NEAP;
 - New and amended pedestrian and cycle routes to improve permeability across the site;
 - Slightly reduced residential densities to west of the site;
 - Slight realignment of the Southern Access Road West in response to a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit (RSA).

Planning Policies

5. National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework – March 2012
Planning Practice Guidance – November 2016

Local Policy

South Cambridgeshire Core Strategy DPD - January 2007
South Cambridgeshire Development Control Policies DPD – July 2007
Northstowe Area Action Plan – July 2007
Northstowe Development Framework Document – August 2012
Northstowe Development Framework Document Addendum - October 2012
Design Codes for Strategic Development Sites within Cambridge Fringe Areas and Northstowe – Approved 28th November 2012
South Cambridgeshire District Council Emerging Local Plan – July 2013

Consultation Responses

6. See Appendix B for summary of consultation responses. See Appendix C for Quality Panel response.

Representations from members of the public

7. Not applicable.

Requirements under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

8. Not Applicable

Officer Report

Introduction – Policy & Material Considerations:

9. Officers consider Design Codes as essential to ensure quality and consistency of development across large development sites. They have been applied successfully in the district such as at Northstowe Phase 1, Trumpington Meadows and the NW Cambridge site. At Northstowe where the site will be built in phases with different delivery arrangements and over a long time, the framework provided by a Design Code is essential. It must strike the balance between providing accurate and useful design guidance whilst permitting innovation and flexibility between architects and designers and over the long build-out period.
10. Members have approved the use of a design code for Northstowe and the process surrounding the production and timeframe of design codes through approving the Design Codes for Strategic Development Sites within Cambridge Fringe Areas and Northstowe document approved by the Northstowe Joint Development Control committee (NJDCC) on the 28th November 2012.
11. Paragraph 59 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 states:
Local planning authorities should consider using design codes where they could help deliver high quality outcomes. However, design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription or detail and should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height landscape, layout, materials and access of new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally.

12. The Planning Practice Guidance notes that in order to promote speed of implementation, avoid stifling responsible innovation and provide flexibility, design codes should wherever possible avoid overly prescriptive detail and encourage sense of place and variety.
13. In addition to the national policy, the Northstowe Area Action Plan (NAAP, July 2007) requires as part of policy NS/2 (b) that Design Guides/ Design Codes for each phase of development will be prepared as part of applications for the grant of approval of reserved matters. The national and local policies therefore both support and require the inclusion of a Design Code for Northstowe.
14. Policy NS/2 requires a design code to be in place early on to form part of the Reserved Matters approval process. Accordingly, Condition 9 of the outline planning permission (S/2011/14/OL) requires: *'Prior to or concurrent with the submission of the first of the reserved matters applications for the development, but excluding enabling works and earthworks for the Campus Site (as described in the S106), a Phase 2 Design Code shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.'* To satisfy the requirements of the condition therefore, the design code is required to be approved prior to the commencement of works on site apart from enabling works and earthworks associated with the Education Campus Site. Officers consider that this early introduction of the design code is beneficial to the development of Northstowe as a town. The early development of the code ensures that both the principles and the details are bound together from the outset to ensure an overall approach to development based on sound design principles. This has been achieved by embedding the concept of the design code at every level of the planning policy and decision making framework ensuring it becomes an essential part of the future place making.
15. In addition to the Condition imposed under permission S/2011/14/OL, a number of other documents are relevant to the development of the design Code. The Northstowe Development Framework Document (August 2012) sets out guiding principles for Northstowe which have been carried through into the development of the design code and therefore ensuring their consideration at the detailed design stage. The Design and Access Statement (August 2014) submitted as part of the outline planning application in accordance with district council guidance. The Design and Access Statement explains key place making principles for Northstowe which have been evolved and embedded within the Design code. Finally, the approved 'Northstowe Phase 1 – Design Code (April 2014)' by Terence O'Rourke has been taken into account when preparing the Code for Phase 2 to ensure continuity across the two phases given that they will both form part of the same town.
16. Planning policy at a national level advises authorities to 'front load' the discharge of condition process and undertake a significant amount of consultation during the pre-application phase. In light of this, over 18 months of pre-application and consultation work has taken place on the design code document. Officers are therefore satisfied that the document presented to Members is well considered and has developed with significant input from the relevant technical and community groups including the Quality Panel. The details of the consultation process are outlined further in the section below:

Introduction: Consultation and Development of the Code

17. Following resolution to grant of the Outline Planning Permission for Northstowe Phase 2 (July 2015) the HCA appointed a design team, led by Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design, to prepare the Design Code for Northstowe Phase 2 in December 2015. As the HCA's objective is to deliver the first homes on Phase 2 from March 2019 the work on the design code was initiated prior to receiving the planning consent in January 2017. It is expected that Condition 9 of the planning consent will be the first to be discharged in order to progress reserved matter applications for infrastructure and residential development. The triggers set out in planning conditions on the Phase 2 outline approval require the Design Code to be submitted prior to or concurrent with submission of the first reserved matters application. The Town Centre Strategy is only required to be approved prior to occupation of the first dwelling. For this reason the Design Code is being prepared in advance of the Town Centre Strategy. Appendix D lists the consultation events held to help develop the Code.
18. The Urban Design Officer at SCDC was involved in writing the brief for a design code, on which basis Tibbalds were appointed. The work on the design code started in February 2016 with an initial workshop with officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC).
19. From the outset the HCA had made a commitment to engage and consult stakeholders and the public on the Design Code as it was being prepared. Consultation included meetings with officers from SCDC and CCC, members of both councils, members of the Parish Councils, specific interest groups and residents of Longstanton and Oakington.

The Cambridgeshire Quality Panel and meetings with SCDC officers:

20. The Cambridgeshire Quality Panel (CQP) reviewed the code on two separate occasions. At the initial meeting (May 2016) feedback focused on the relationship between the Design Code and the Town Centre Strategy. The order of these strategic documents is guided by planning conditions with the latter not being required until later in the development process. However, the HCA has taken feedback on board and is progressing the Town Centre Strategy in advance of the required trigger. Additional, feedback from the CQP included comments on the level of prescriptiveness vs flexibility, the code's clarity and the movement structure. These comments were taken on board during the development of the code.
21. Detailed commentary from SCDC was also fed back to the HCA principally relating to the ease of navigation through document, length of the document, need to articulate a strong vision, need for a Town Centre Strategy, clarity of mandatory and discretionary elements, the number of character areas and robustness of the block sizes in particular the mews quarter. Following further discussions the code was amended in April 2017 and presented to the Quality Panel in May 2017. The amended document had addressed a number of points previously raised – there was a stronger emphasis on mandatory elements, the character areas were reduced in number and the document had included tables to improve the readability of the document and a materials palette and building details. Additional text was also provided which clarified that any development must be in line with both higher level Design Code requirements and the more detailed requirement of what will be a Town Centre Strategy. It should be noted that whilst the Design Code is being prepared in advance of the Town Centre Strategy substantial thought has been given to the character, design and phasing of the town centre. This thinking and testing has been incorporated within the code and will be supplemented in the Town Centre Strategy.

22. At the second review (May 2017) the panel had an opportunity to review the code on the example of the town centre section as well as a particular character area. Apart from the request to be consulted on the emerging Town Centre Strategy comments focused around the quality of public realm, the use of shared spaces and innovative street design as well as the overall length of the document. The comments from the CQP have informed the final document.

Consultation with local residents, interest groups and elected members:

23. There have been two rounds of public consultation undertaken by the HCA on the design code during its development. Initial consultation during May/June 2016 focused on issues and principles and a second round of consultation April/May 2017 gave all parties an opportunity to comment on the detail of the design code prior to formal submission. The local community, elected Members and interest groups, such as representatives from the cycling lobby had the opportunity to provide their views on the emerging code as well as the final draft document through a number of meetings, two exhibitions and presentations to the Northstowe Community Forum and online platform. During May / June 2016 a dedicated website was available for a four week period. As part of these engagement events, all SCDC Members were sent specific invitations to attend a pre-view of the emerging design code on the 20 May 2016 and relevant CCC Members and Parish Councillors were also invited to attend.
24. A workshop session was held with the Northstowe Community Working Group on 21 May 2016, which was part of a public consultation drop-in event at Longstanton Village Institute. During the consultation on the emerging code, the website was visited by 312 visitors and 239 comments were received. Of these only a small number (15 comments) were negative. These related mostly to the vision being too urban and dense as well as the design requirements of the open spaces, including the Town Park, Rampton Drift edges and Paddocks Park. Apart from the few negative comments, the feedback received from the exhibition and the website was either favourable or neutral (224 comments).
25. Feedback was used to improve the content of the Phase 2 Design Code and a draft document was produced for consultation in April/May 2017. The consultation on the final draft design code received only very few comments (9 comments); these primarily related to highway matters, ecology, health and the suitability of allotments within Paddocks Parkland. In response to the community concerns, the allotments have been moved to a different location. A briefing was provided at SCDC's Planning Committee on 10 May 2017. On 24th July 2017 the HCA attended the parish planning meeting to present the final document and answer questions and clarifications.
26. Design Code Testing;
On the 17th May 2017 the HCA organised and facilitated a code testing workshop. This included representatives from SCDC, the County Council, three different architectural practices, Tibbalds and the HCA. The code was found to contain a good balance of requirements in relation to important design considerations and flexibility to allow innovation. This session allowed the robustness of some of the blocks and infrastructure arrangements to be tested. The feedback from the session influenced the final design code document in regard to block width, definition of frontages and clarity of requirements. The County Council emphasised at the workshop that certain aspects of the Code may not be adoptable and so additional text has been added to the Code to highlight the few areas where management companies may have to be set up by developers.

Summary of the Submitted Design Code – Introduction

27. The design code aims not to be prescriptive, but rather to focus on providing guidance to enable developers to formulate their own approach within clearly defined boundaries. This is in accordance with National Planning Policy.
28. The design code document is set out in four parts. The document structure reflects its application to Northstowe, with Parts 1 and 2 being town wide and establishing the overall design approach for the primary town wide features, Parts 3 focusing on each specific character area whilst Part 4 provides guidance on detailed aspects of the Code. A Summary of each of the four sections is provided below:

Part 1

29. The first section of the Code sets the vision for Northstowe Phase 2 and provides some context to help explain how the vision was derived. There is also an explanation as to the purpose and status of the Design Code document to help future users understand the weight that should be given to the guidance it provides. This part of the document looks at the town wide vision and explains that the Code aims to provide a town that is both rich in character and locally distinctive whilst also providing excellent legibility and adaptability.

Part 2

30. The approved Parameter Plans for Northstowe Phase 2 set the basic framework and restrictions for the second phase of the town. This part of the Design Code provides a more detailed framework that expands upon the approved Parameter Plans and sets mandatory requirements for securing quality and character. It is important to note that the guidelines set out in this section should be applied flexibly. For example, privacy for occupiers of urban dwellings may be provided by the design of window types rather than by traditional back to back distances. The site wide requirements of Part 2 provide the detail for ensuring the quality and vision outlined in Part 1 and in the supporting documents of the outline planning permission. Part 2 divides the town into seven different character areas, each of which has been designed to provide distinctive characteristics that relate to local conditions.
31. This part of the design code also establishes the hierarchy of movement corridors, which are intended to provide a comprehensive network of legible routes. The main routes are the dedicated busway spine for the town and the primary streets all of which will have associated dedicated cycle routes. Guidance is also provided for lesser streets namely secondary streets, tertiary streets and private drives. Part 2 also provides guidance on landscape and open space with the underpinning approach to the landscape features being to unify and unite, whilst being diverse and ecologically rich. The key landscape features are the green buffer zones to Longstanton, to form a “buffer” between the existing and the new settlements; the creation of a new town park in the centre and a water park alongside the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway that will contain the surface water attenuation lakes for Northstowe; and the greenways which provide links across Phase 2.

Part 3

32. The third part of the Design Code focuses on the seven Character Areas. It is important that Northstowe contains a variety of different areas to help people understand where they are and to aid legibility. The Design Code will ensure that variation is provided by the Character Areas whilst at the same time ensuring a coherent town-wide structure. The creation of the Character Areas has been informed by a variety of factors including existing features on site (e.g. hedgerows and Rampton Drift) and examples of successful developments from the local area. The third part provides a summary table at the end of each of the seven Character Area sections to help define what each area must achieve.

Part 4

33. The final section of the Design Code provides details of the specific facets of creating a place including cycle and car parking standards, the lighting strategy and the biodiversity strategy. Concerns have been expressed by Longstanton Parish Council with regard to the amount of parking provision. It should be noted that condition 53 of the Phase 2 outline permission requires an average of 1.75 car parking spaces per dwelling. The Design Code reasserts the required average across Phase 2 but a table illustrating how this average could be broken down across dwelling sizes has been removed to allow developers to address car parking on a parcel by parcel basis.

Recommendation

34. Members are recommended to approve the Discharge of Condition 9 (Design Code) of S/2011/14/OL

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.

- Planning File Ref: S/2407/17/DC
- Appendix A: Condition 9 of S/2011/14/OL.
- Appendix B: Summary of consultation and neighbour responses.
- Appendix C: Quality Panel response.
- Appendix D: List of consultation events held to help develop the Code.

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