

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee

5th April 2006

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0045/06/F Melbourn
Erection of 16 Houses and 4 Flats Including 5 Affordable Dwellings Following
Demolition of Former Research and Development Buildings, Cambridge House, Back
Lane for Camstead Ltd And Cambridge Antibody Technology Ltd

Recommendation: Delegated Approval

Date for Determination: 13th April 2006

Site and Proposal

1. This full application, registered on 12th January 2006 proposes the erection of 16 houses and 4 flats (including 5 affordable dwellings) following the demolition of former research and development buildings on a 0.649ha site at the junction of Back Lane and High Street, Melbourn.
2. The existing buildings are located towards the eastern end of the site, with a large open car parking area at the western end. The site abuts directly onto High Street along part of its north boundary and for the remainder it is to the rear of two houses in High Street and the side of a house in The Lawns Close. To the east the site abuts the rear gardens of properties in The Lawns Close and an area of vacant land. Along the northern section of this boundary the ground level of the site is significantly below that of The Lawns Close. To the south the site abuts Back Lane. At the east end of the Back Lane frontage there is a bank with planting on top, which is part within the public highway. In parts the bank is in excess of 2m in height. The existing vehicular access to the site is towards the west end this frontage. Opposite the site in Back Lane are three detached houses which are on a raised bank above the level of the application site. To the rear of these houses is the PA Consulting site. The site tapers towards the west boundary where there is some planting within the site although there is more substantial planting beyond, on highway land.
3. The application comprises 2 x one-bedroom flats; 2 x two-bedroom flats; 2 x two - bedroom houses; 6 x three-bedroom houses; 3 x four-bedroom houses and 4 x five-bedroom houses. The one and two-bedroom flats and the two-bedroom terraced house are proposed as affordable dwellings. This represents 25% of the total number of dwellings to be built. The density of the development is 30.8 dph.
4. The proposal is for a single point of access towards the west end of the Back Lane frontage, to maximise visibility. The proposed roadway serving the development runs to the rear of existing houses in High Street.
5. As originally submitted the layout plan proposed 5 detached houses with rear gardens facing the High Street frontage. The existing hedgerow along that frontage was shown to be trimmed and retained. Three of those properties were two and a half storey properties. Proposed amendments to the scheme retain five dwellings in this part of the site but two of the detached houses become a pair of semi detached dwellings and only one of these dwellings is now a two and a half storey property.

6. As originally submitted the affordable dwellings, in the form of the four flats and attached two-bedroom dwelling were positioned in the northeast corner of the site of the site, adjacent to existing properties in The Lawns Close. The proposed amended drawings relocate the affordable dwellings to the southeast corner, backing onto Back Lane and the vacant land to the northeast. They are replaced in the northeast corner by two detached houses.
7. In addition along the Back Lane frontage are two pairs of houses and two detached dwellings. All plots have vehicular and pedestrian access via the Back Lane access.
8. The site is relatively flat at the western end but there is a significant change in level at the eastern end where the site is below that of the adjacent houses in The Lawns Close. The bank along part of the Back Lane frontage continues for a distance into the site and some re-grading work is proposed to provide garden land to the proposed dwellings in this part of the site.
9. A footpath is shown from the proposed site entrance that links to an existing footpath at the southwest corner of the site, that continues onto High Street.
10. The site is within the village framework and adjoins the Conservation Area in the northeast corner.
11. The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement, a brief Design Statement, a Tree Survey, a Traffic Statement, Ecology Walkover Survey, brief Drainage Statement, an executive summary of a geotechnical survey and a Marketing Report, all of which can be viewed as part of the background papers and will be displayed at the meeting.

Planning History

12. Any planning history relates to the use of the site for employment purposes. Planning consent was granted in August 1998 for the use of the site for purposes within Use Class B1(b) Research and Development) (**Ref S/0316/98/F**). There have been no applications on the site since 2000.

Planning Policy

13. **Policy SE2** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") identifies Melbourn as a Rural Growth Settlement where residential development or redevelopment will be permitted on unallocated land within the village framework provided that the retention of the site in its present form is not essential to the character of the village; the development would be sensitive to the character of the village, local features of landscape or ecological importance, and the amenities of neighbours; the village has the necessary infrastructure capacity; and residential development would not conflict with another policy of the Plan, particularly policy EM8.
14. Development should be of 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.
15. **Policy HG7** of The Local Plan states that the Council will negotiate with applicants to secure the provision of accommodation to meet some of the continuing need for affordable housing in the District before it determines any planning application for residential development of more than 10 dwellings on land within the framework of a

village of more than 3000 population such as Melbourn. The affordable housing provision should represent approximately 30% of the total number of dwellings for which planning permission may be given, although higher or lower percentages may be agreed in the light of factors such as proximity to local services; access to public transport; the particular costs associated with the development; and whether the provision of affordable housing would prejudice other planning objectives warranting greater priority in the particular case.

16. **Policy HG10** of The Local Plan states that residential developments will be required to contain a mix of units providing accommodation in a range of types, sizes (including 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings) and affordability, making best use of the site and promoting a sense of community which reflects local needs. The design and layout of schemes should be informed by the wider character and context of the local townscape and landscape. Schemes should also achieve high quality design and distinctiveness, avoiding inflexible standards and promoting energy efficiency.
17. **Policy EM8** of The Local Plan states that the conversion, change of use or re-development of existing employment sites to non employment uses within village frameworks will be resisted unless the existing use is generating environmental problems such as noise, pollution or unacceptable levels of traffic or where it is demonstrated that the site is inappropriate for any employment use to continue having regard to market demand.
18. **Policy EN30** of The Local Plan requires that development in Conservation Areas or affecting their setting should preserve or enhance the special character or appearance of those areas.
19. **Policy P7/6** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") seeks to protect the historic built environment.

Consultation

20. **Melbourn Parish Council** recommends approval. " We feel that the location of the affordable housing flats block will cause unnecessary traffic usage along the full length of the road. Consideration should be given to relocating this at the 'west end' of the development. The existing hedgerows on the High Street and into Back Lane are old and well established and need protection both during and after development."
21. Comments on the amended drawings will be reported at the meeting.
22. The **Local Highway Authority** accepts the visibility splays provided, however, the junction should comprise radii of 6.0m. It is recommended that the site and block plan be fully dimensioned. The Highway Authority is not convinced that a footway running west along Back Lane linking into High Street is all that necessary and questions where the pedestrian desire line is likely to be.
23. Comments on the amended drawings will be reported at the meeting.
24. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests conditions restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the period of construction and requiring an investigation of the site to be undertaken prior to the commencement of any development to establish the nature and extent of any contamination of the site. Informatives should be attached to any consent regarding the use of driven pile foundations and the requirement for a Demolition Notice.

25. **Cambridgeshire Archaeology** requests a condition requiring that the site the subject to a programme of archaeological investigation prior to any consent.
26. The **Chief Financial Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council** confirms that in this particular case education capacity is available in the local area. A contribution is not therefore sought by the County Council.
27. The **Environment Agency** requests conditions requiring a scheme for the provision and implementation of ground contamination investigation, assessment and remediation, and a scheme for surface water drainage. It also puts forward a list of informatives to be attached to any consent.
28. The **Conservation Manager** concludes that the proposed residential development is inappropriate for this site and would seriously compromise both key site characteristics and become a significant imposition on the appearance and amenity of the village. The proposal would appear to be in conflict with key policies relating to employment protection and development within villages and presents a poor design layout which compromises the very features it is trying to retain. He is therefore of the opinion that the development should be reused.
29. If residential development of this site is to be supported it would need to be of a less intense nature which strengthened both the Back Lane and High Street landscape features, as well as the junction planting area. Clearly any such development would need to directly address Back Lane and incorporate the bank into the frontage of any development. Given the above the Conservation Manager suggests that any residential development of this site would need to be reduced in numbers, incorporate green space, public art and affordable housing as a minimum.
30. Comments on the amended drawings will be reported at the meeting.
31. The **Trees and Landscapes Officer** comments that any existing established regenerated Ash and Sycamore trees should be retained and not removed. The location of these trees in relation to the proposed footprint of plot 1 is just within the acceptable criteria of BS 8837.05. It is essential that the existing levels are not changed within the appropriate root protection areas of trees T1 to T12 with particular reference to T1 (Field Maple). Similarly T14 (Norway Maple) is just within the BS standard in relation to the footprint of Plot 8. The existing planting along High Street is essentially Blackthorn and is a very important foil between the site and the main road. The reference to 'trim and manage' needs to be qualified. The structural and visual integrity of the hedge must be retained.
32. If approved conditions should be attached in relation to tree protection, the submission of landscaping scheme.
33. Comments on the amended drawings will be reported at the meeting.
34. The comments of the **Development Officer** have been sought and will be reported to the meeting.

Representations

35. Letters have been received from six adjoining properties commenting on the original scheme.

36. The occupier of No 167 High Street is concerned that the road for the garages will border his property both the east and south sides which could cause aggravation in terms of noise from cars driving past, car doors slamming, garage doors banging and possibly children playing football or using skateboards in the area. There is also the possibility of the fence being knocked and damaged. If there is no alternative to the current plan it is suggested that a 1.8m high brick wall is erected either in place of the fence or butting up to it. This would serve both to reduce noise and give additional protection.
37. The occupier of No 169 High Street expresses similar concerns about the proposed road. It is pointed out that when the current building was operational the roadway at the rear of the site was a delivery route and was only ever used by a few vehicles a week and never during evenings or weekends. The proposed roadway will open up a security issue at the rear of the property. The road should be re-sited and a 1.8m high brick wall built on the other side of the boundary fence with substantial landscaping of tall evergreens to help stem the noise and protect security and privacy. In addition it is pointed out that the foul drain from No167 connects into the foul drainage on the application site through the proposed Plots 5 and 15.
38. The occupiers of No 6 The Lawns Close queries why the proposed flats are being built so near an existing quiet residential area when it is a large site with no surrounding properties and residents that would oppose this build. Was this site chosen to hide the build away so as not to spoil the view of the site? There is concern about the level of noise that will be generated by the number of residents within the flats and the use of the car park to the flats, which runs alongside the garden of No6. It would be more obvious to have one or two houses in this location, which would be more in keeping with surrounding properties.
39. The occupiers of No 5 The Lawns Close asks why more houses are needed in a village that is becoming over populated. Every piece of land is being developed without thought to people that have lived in the area for a long time. The proposals will result in the loss of an employment site. How can a change of use be given when the site was for light industrial use only?
40. Will the surgery be able to cope with more people? There is a water shortage and yet more houses are proposed and on a flood plain. What about the water pressure and sewerage. Questions are asked as to how far the proposed properties are from the boundary of No 5 and how can they be not to be intrusive and cut out light? What are affordable houses and rented? Why can't the affordable housing be at the beginning of the estate and the two storey executive houses at the rear of The Lawns Close.
41. There is concern about noise and there should be no building work or noise before 8am or after 5pm and no weekend working. There should be no loud music, shouting or abusive language.
42. There is concern about noise pollution and dust pollution when the existing buildings are demolished, and whether they contain asbestos. The height of the boundary fence should be increased and a wall built to protect existing properties. What contamination has been found on the site?
43. The occupiers of No 4 The Lawns Close is concerned that noise levels will increase from the previous light industrial use. There is concern that the proposed siting of the affordable housing will cause the highest volume of traffic and noise for all the existing homeowners. The properties having the greatest density should be

positioned backing onto Back Lane or High Street where there are no existing properties.

44. The occupiers of No 3 The Lawns Close comment that the estate is a very quiet residential area and the site has always been occupied by light industrial companies with no problems of noise. The erection of 20 dwellings on the site is going to result in a considerable increase in noise levels within the area. There are similar concerns to those expressed above in respect of the demolition of the existing building, the position of the proposed affordable houses, and the need for a boundary fence. It is again asked that restrictions be placed on the hours of working.
45. Any comments on the amended scheme will be reported to the meeting

Planning Comments – Key Issues

46. The key issues to be considered with this application are whether the proposed redevelopment of this site for residential use complies with the criteria set out in Policy EM8 of the Local Plan; whether the proposal complies with Policy SE2 (including neighbour amenity) and HG10 of the Local Plan; whether the proposal provides affordable housing in accordance with Policy HG7 and; whether the proposal preserves or enhances the character of the adjacent Conservation Area (Policy EN30).
47. Policy EM8 encourages of the retention of existing employment sites in villages. Information on marketing has been supplied with the application. The application site has been marketed as an employment site from October 2002 until October 2005 and the guide price dropped during that period. No buyer has been found within that period, which is well in excess of the 12-months suggested in the Local Plan. I am content that the requirements of Policy EM8 have been addressed in this instance and that in principle an application for the redevelopment of the site for residential use can be considered.
48. The site is bordered by residential development on three sides. I do not consider that the retention of the site in its present form is essential to the character of the village. Policy SE2 of the Local Plan requires development to be sensitive to the character of the village, local features of landscape or ecological importance, and the amenities of neighbours.
49. As originally submitted I do not consider that the scheme met this part of the criteria of Policy SE2. The revised scheme proposes a number of changes, which may enable me to alter this view. The access roadway remains as originally submitted, the point of access to the site being dictated by highway considerations. Although this results in the roadway passing close to the rear boundaries of existing houses in High Street, the repositioning of the affordable housing to the south east corner of the site means that the intensive use of the roadway and parking areas at this point is reduced from that originally proposed. There is space to provide some planting between the proposed roadway and the rear of properties in High Street and a condition can be imposed requiring appropriate boundary treatment, which could take the form of a brick wall.
50. The introduction of two detached houses in the northeast corner of the site and the relocation of the affordable dwellings to the southeast corner provides for an improved relationship to adjoining properties. Detailed levels and sections will be provided for this part of the site due to the difference in ground levels between the

site and existing properties. This will enable officers to ensure that the relationship of the proposed development with adjacent dwellings is satisfactory.

51. Levels and sections are also to be provided for the Back Lane frontage to show how the existing bank is to be re-graded. The existing planting on the bank will be retained and it is proposed to erect a 1.2m high 'hit and miss' fence on top of the bank, behind the trees, as a means of the boundary treatment to the rear gardens of the proposed houses backing onto Back Lane. I am of the view that these details will help to address some of the concerns of the Conservation Manager about the treatment of this frontage.
52. The erection of 20 dwellings is within the scale of development allowed for Melbourn under Policy SE2 of the Local Plan and there have been no objections from statutory undertakers in terms of infrastructure provision. Conditions will be attached to any consent requiring the submission of schemes for foul and surface water drainage, and an investigation of the site to assess any contamination and put forward remedial works if required.
53. The density achieves the minimum 30dph required by Policy SE2. A reduction in the number of units would result in the density dropping below that figure. The housing mix was agreed by officers prior to the application being submitted. Although the Local Development Framework seeks to change the mix of dwellings that should be sought I consider that little weight can be given to the proposed change at this stage given that objections to that policy have been received and taking into account the length of time that this site has been the subject of informal discussions with officers.
54. Revisions have been made to the detailed elevational treatment of a number of the proposed dwellings and the comments of the Conservation Manager on these changes will be reported at the meeting. The number of two and a half storey dwellings has been reduced and a pair of houses introduced into the High Street frontage. I consider that the approach is likely to be considered more appropriate than the original submission.
55. Although formal comments are awaited I am aware that during informal discussions prior to the submission of the application the number and mix of affordable units was agreed with the Development Officer. Although Policy HG7 states that the number of affordable dwellings provided should be approximately 30% it states that that higher or lower percentages may be agreed taking into account a number of factors including development costs. It is my understanding in this case the provision of 5 affordable dwellings, 25% of the scheme, has been accepted by the Development Officer having taken into account development costs, which in this case will include demolition any decontamination works. Although the Local Development Framework seeks to increase this percentage I consider that little weight can be given to the proposed change at this stage given that objections to that policy have been received and taking into account the length of time that this site has been the subject of informal discussions with officers.
56. The comments of the Trees and Landscapes Officer will be incorporated into the revised scheme. It is important to ensure that existing planting within the site is safeguarded and enhanced, particularly on the High Street and Back Lane frontages.
57. Conditions will be attached to any consent restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the period of demolition and construction works. There will be an informative on any consent reminding the applicants of the need for a

Demolition Notice which will deal with the issue of any asbestos within the existing buildings.

58. A scheme of 20 dwellings does not require the provision of open space under approved Development Plan policies. Although the Local Development Framework seeks to reduce that threshold I consider that little weight can be given to the proposed change at this stage given that objections to that policy have been received and taking into account the length of time that this site has been the subject of informal discussions with officers.
59. The applicants attention will be drawn to the existence of the foul drain pointed out by the occupier of 169 High Street. The site is not within a flood plain. Boundary treatment will be controlled by condition.
60. The applicant will be required to enter into a Section 106 Agreement to secure the provision of affordable housing. The agreement, which can be required by condition, can also deal with the provision of public art.

Recommendation

61. Subject to the response to the consultation on the amended drawings and the satisfactory resolution of any outstanding issues, that delegated powers be given to approve the application as amended subject to safeguarding conditions. Conditions will include a requirement for the applicant to enter into a Section 106 Agreement securing the provision of affordable housing. I will seek delegated powers to refuse the application if the above cannot be achieved by the determination date of 13 April.

Informatives

62. Informatives to be attached from the Chief Environmental Health Officer and Environment Agency

Reasons for Approval

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003: P7/6** (Historic Built Environment);
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: SE2** (Development in Rural Growth Settlements),
 - **HG10** (Housing Mix and Design) and **EN30** (Development in/adjacent to Conservation Areas)
 - **HG7** (Affordable Housing on Sites within Village Frameworks)
 - **EM8** (Loss of Employment Sites in Villages)
2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Residential amenity including noise disturbance and overlooking issues
 - Highway safety
 - Visual impact on the locality
 - Impact upon setting of adjacent Conservation Area
 - Loss of Employment Site

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 Application Ref S/0045/06/F

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