

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 10th May 2006
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0442/06/F – Stapleford
17 Houses, 8 Flats and Change of Use of Agricultural Land for New Football Pitch at Hill Farm, Gog Magog Way for Granta Housing

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for determination: 5th June 2006 (Major Application)

Members will visit the site on Monday 8th May 2006.

Site and Proposal

1. The site is made up of two adjoining rectangular blocks of land totalling approximately 1.5 hectares. A U-shaped group of brick, boarding and blockwork asbestos roof farm buildings with an existing farm access to the west stand in the west corner of the site with a render and asbestos sheeting roof farm building to the north. The remainder of the site is cultivated or uncultivated land. The rear of one of the existing farm buildings sits along the western part of the Gog Magog Way frontage. A hedge runs along the eastern half of the site's Gog Magog Way frontage. The site falls to the north but the land then rises beyond the site to the north. Two-storey red brick and concrete interlocking tile roof dwellings fronting Gog Magog Way lie to the south of the site (Nos. 63-75 odd). The rear boundaries of these properties are marked by low fencing with some planting.
2. This full application, registered on the 6th March 2006 and amended by plans date stamped the 11th and 18th April 2006, proposes 8 no. 1-bedroom flats, 13no. 2-bedroom houses and 4no. 3-bedroom houses on the westernmost of the two rectangular blocks of land that make up the application site. All the buildings are two-storey. The flats on the Gog Magog Way frontage being 9.3m high and the houses, grouped around a new access road off Gog Magog Way and a new crescent shaped road, being 9m high. All the units would have 5m high eaves and 40 degree gable ended pitched roofs. A central area of green space is proposed. A football pitch is proposed on the easternmost of the two rectangular blocks of land that make up the application site with vehicular access provided via the new access road and pedestrian access by a path between the flats and No.63 Gog Magog Way. A total of 37 parking spaces would be provided for the flats and houses. No dedicated parking spaces would be provided for the football pitch. Players and spectators would be expected to park on the existing recreation ground on the opposite side of Gog Magog Way. Perimeter planting is proposed around the residential development. The density of the residential part of the proposal equates to approximately 40 dwellings to the hectare. The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Biodiversity & Site Assessment.

Planning History

3. Planning permission was granted in 2002 for change of use of the existing agricultural buildings on the site to office and storage use (Classes B1 and B8) under reference **S/1835/02/F**.

Planning Policy

4. Structure Plan 2003 **Policy P1/3** relates to sustainable design in built development and requires a high standard of design for all new development which responds to the local character of the built environment.
5. Local Plan 2004 **Policy GB2** states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. It also states that development is 'inappropriate' unless it comprises, amongst others, uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and affordable housing in accordance with Policy HG8 where no suitable sites are available outside the Green Belt. It also requires any development considered appropriate in the Green Belt to be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
6. Local Plan 2004 **Policy HG8** states that, as an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the Local Plan, planning permission may be granted for schemes of 100% affordable housing designed to meet identified local housing needs on sites within or adjoining villages. The policy states that the following criteria will all have to be met:-
 - (1) the development proposal includes secure arrangements for ensuring that all the dwellings within the scheme provide affordable housing in perpetuity for those in 'housing need' as defined in policy HG7.
 - (2) the number, size, design, mix and tenure of the dwellings are all confined to, and appropriate to, the strict extent of the identified local need.
 - (3) the site of the proposal is well related to the built-up area of the settlement and the scale of the scheme is appropriate to the size and character of the village.
 - (4) the development does not damage the character of the village or the rural landscape.

It also states that development under this policy must also: be limited to units of types and sizes required to provide accommodation for those revealed to be in 'housing need' by an up-to-date survey; be occupied only by qualifying persons, subject to cascade provisions; and be secured in perpetuity as to the above provisions (or any agreed departure from them) by planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or an alternative form of equally effective provision.
7. Local Plan 2004 **Policy TP1** states that the Council will seek, through its decisions on planning applications, to promote more sustainable transport choices and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car, by amongst other things restricting car parking to a maximum of an average of 1½ spaces plus ¼ space for visitors per dwelling.
8. Local Plan 2004 **Policy RT1** states that, in considering applications for the development of recreation facilities, the District Council will have regard to the need for such facilities and the benefits which might accrue. The District Council will resist any proposals which would:
 - (1) result in the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a);
 - (2) not be in close proximity to and not be well related with an established settlement and its built-up area;

- (3) result in buildings and other structures not directly related to the proposed use;
 - (4) by reason of its scale, form, design and materials of the proposal, together with any associated development such as clubhouses, pavilions, and other buildings and structures would create an intrusive feature in the landscape or surrounding area;
 - (5) result in the loss of ecological, wildlife and archaeological interests;
 - (6) generate significant motorised traffic movements;
 - (7) have inadequate provision for parking and manoeuvring of cars and service vehicles to the District Council's standards;
 - (8) not provide appropriate provision for screening and to minimise the visual intrusion into neighbouring development and the countryside;
 - (9) not undertake adequate measures for the screened storage and safe disposal of refuse.
9. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN3** states that, in those cases where new development is permitted in the countryside, the Council will require that (a) the scale, design and layout of the scheme (b) the materials used within it, and (c) the landscaping works are all appropriate to the particular 'Landscape Character Area' (the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Area in this instance), and reinforce local distinctiveness wherever possible.
10. Local Plan 2004 **Policy EN13** states that the District Council will not grant planning permission for development which could adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, the habitats of animal and plant species which are protected by law unless the need for the development clearly outweighs the importance of conserving that habitat and the advice of English Nature is to the effect that permission may be granted. Where development is permitted which may have an effect on these species, the District Council will impose conditions, where appropriate, and seek to use its powers to enter into planning agreements to: facilitate the survival of individual members of the species; reduce disturbance to a minimum; and provide adequate alternative habitats to sustain at least the current levels of population.

Consultations

11. **Stapleford Parish Council** recommends refusal on the grounds that:
- “(i) A traffic management scheme should be included;
 - (ii) Guarantee needed that the housing will continue to be affordable;
 - (iii) A scheme needed to ensure occupation by local people;
 - (iv) Undesirable to have blocks of flats in front of scheme, overbearing in size and position.”
12. **Housing Special Projects Officer** states that the proposed mix is generally in accordance with the identified local need as set out in the results of the September 2005 Stapleford Housing Needs Survey. However, she states that the Needs Survey only shows a need for 5 1-bedroom flats within the next two years and a need for a further 5 within the next 2-5 years. As there is also a need for 2-bedroom flats and 2-bedroom flats also give occupiers greater flexibility as their circumstances change, she considers the proportion of 1-bedroom flats proposed to be excessive.
13. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** recommends conditions and informatives to be attached to any permission relating to site contamination investigation and a remediation strategy if necessary, times when power operated machinery shall not be operated during the demolition and construction periods except in accordance with

agreed noise restrictions, driven pile foundations, and stating that there shall be no bonfires or burning of waste on site during demolition and construction except with his Department's prior permission and the need for a Demolition Notice.

14. **Ecology Officer** welcomes that fact that the application is supported by an ecological assessment and particularly that it has considered the South Cambs Biodiversity Checklist. However, he states that the initial assessment was conducted in November 2005 and whilst the report recommends that further investigations be made in Spring for the protected common lizard, no such further assessment appears to have been completed. He also states that the application fails to provide any form of biodiversity enhancement yet acknowledges that various species will be impacted. He therefore has a holding objection to the proposal.
15. **Local Highway Authority** states that, in order to provide adequate visibility to the west of the junction onto Gog Magog Way, an uninterrupted view across the verge on the opposite side/inside of the bend is required and the 3 existing trees within this area MUST be removed and this areas thereafter maintained clear of planting. It also queries where the additional cars generated by the proposed pitch would park.
16. **Environment Agency** states that the District Council is required to respond on behalf of the Agency in respect of flood risk and surface water drainage related issues in this instance but, nonetheless, makes advisory comments in relation to surface and foul water drainage.
17. **County Archaeology** states that its records indicate that the site lies in an area of some archaeological potential – there are several earthworks, some at least of medieval date, in and around Hill Farm and it is possible that additional, as yet unknown archaeological features may survive on the site which could be severely damaged or destroyed by the proposed development. It therefore recommends a condition requiring a programme of archaeological investigation to be carried out is attached to any permission.
18. **Sport England** supports the principle of the new football pitch. It recommends that a condition requiring a survey to confirm whether the ground conditions (drainage capacity and topography) would provide any constraints to ensuring that a good quality playing surface can be developed and detailing any necessary mitigation measures is attached to any permission. It confirms that the dimensions and orientation of the pitch accord with its guidance. It does however object on the basis that the necessary two team changing facility is not proposed and on the basis of lack of dedicated parking for up to 25 cars for the pitch which it states is likely to result in residential amenity conflicts as users will park on the roads.
19. **Cultural Services Manager, Landscape Design Officer, General Works Manager, Cambs Fire & Rescue Service and Police Architectural Liaison Officer** were consulted but had not commented at the time this report was compiled.

Representations

20. Objections have been received from the occupiers of 10, 41, 63, 73, Meadowcroft Barn and Green Hedges Barn, Gog Magog Way; 13, 15, 36, 62 and Middlefield House, Haverhill Road; and 7 Dukes Meadow on the following grounds:
 - a. The development is too large for this Green Belt area, out of character with the surrounding rural area, would have a significant adverse effect on the rural

- character, openness and landscape of the Green Belt and would significantly affect the look and environment of this part of the village;
- b. Low-cost housing does not justify the loss of this land;
 - c. Change of views from park and Green Hedges Barn;
 - d. Gog Magog Way is narrow with a sharp bend and is inadequate to cater for the additional traffic that would be generated;
 - e. There are existing parking problems in the area where the entrance is proposed;
 - f. Use of the proposed sports pitch would shatter the peace and tranquillity currently enjoyed by the elderly residents of 11-15 odd Haverhill Road;
 - g. The orientation of the pitch with the goal backing onto properties in Gog Magog Way increases nuisance to residents;
 - h. The design and height of the houses and their arrangement in an urban cul-de-sac is inappropriate and does not accord with the Council's Design Guide;
 - i. The flats are wholly insensitive in mass and scale and would be overbearing to the occupiers of 63 Gog Magog Way;
 - j. Overlooking of properties in Gog Magog Way;
 - k. Submitted scheme does not reflect motions of the Parish Council;
 - l. Inadequate consultation by Granta Housing Society;
 - m. Proposed type and mix of units does not reflect the Needs Survey and does not indicate tenure and ownership arrangements to ensure the affordable housing is secured in perpetuity;
 - n. Proposal over caters for the existing needs of the village;
 - o. Affordable housing should be distributed in smaller groups allowing for proper integration within the village;
 - p. The football pitch is inappropriately sited with no additional parking (requiring children to cross Gog Magog Way from the recreation ground), parking or changing rooms;
 - q. How long will the football pitch remain a football pitch as there is currently no agreement with the Parish Council?;
 - r. The boundary of the site should be a continuation of the rear boundary of properties in Gog Magog Way;
 - s. The site is not adjoining the boundaries of the village and the proposal does not comply with Exceptions Sites Policy;
 - t. There are other potential sites for affordable housing within the village;
 - u. The application should be put in the context of the new housing allocations to the south of Cambridge including the Southern Fringe development;
 - v. Distance to local services and amenities;
 - w. The LDF Recreation Study does not justify the proposed football pitch;
 - x. Government policy suggests that the houses will not be affordable in perpetuity;
 - y. Dangers to players if balls are kicked on Haverhill Road;
 - z. Loss of wildlife habitats;
 - aa. Additional pollution;
 - bb. Disturbance and potential dangers to children visiting the recreation ground during construction period;
 - cc. Additional pressure on local schools; and
 - dd. What are the proposed plans for the stretch of land between the proposed football pitch and Haverhill Road, this land not being suitable for modern farming methods? Is further development planned?
21. The occupier of 21 Gog Magog Way welcomes the plans as they will offer a glimmer of hope for young people.
 22. A petition in support of affordable housing at Hill Farm, signed by 74 people, has been received.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

23. The main issues in relation to this application are:
- a. Whether this countryside and Green Belt site is an appropriate location for affordable housing and whether the scale of affordable housing proposed is acceptable;
 - b. Whether the layout and impact of the development is appropriate and preserves the rural character and openness of the countryside and Green Belt;
 - c. Whether the proposed mix of dwellings meets the identified local need;
 - d. Impact on neighbours;
 - e. Highway and parking matters;
 - f. Ecological matters; and
 - g. Whether this is an appropriate location for the proposed football pitch.
24. Although the site is not within or adjoining the village framework, it is well-related to the existing settlement and I consider that some form of affordable housing on the site would be acceptable to meet identified local need. However, it is my view, and a view I conveyed to the agent before the application was submitted, that the residential development should not extend any further to the northeast than the rear boundaries of Nos. 63-75 odd Gog Magog Way. Existing development/gardens fronting this part of Gog Magog Way and Haverhill Road are distinctive and regular in the extent to which they extend back from the road. Due to the extent to which the proposed residential development intrudes into the Green Belt and the height of the buildings (ranging from 9-9.3m high – considerably higher than Nos. 63-75 odd Gog Magog Way), the proposed development would have an unacceptable adverse affect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
25. IF the scale of the development and its impact on the countryside and Green Belt was considered to be acceptable, I consider that the proposed layout around a crescent with flats on the frontage would be appropriate
26. The proposed mix is generally in accordance with the identified local need as set out in the results of the September 2005 Stapleford Housing Needs Survey. However, whilst 8no. 1-bedroom flats are proposed, the Needs Survey only shows a need for 5 1-bedroom flats within the next two years and a need for a further 5 within the next 2-5 years. As there is also a need for 2-bedroom flats and as 2-bedroom flats also give occupiers greater flexibility as their circumstances changed, I consider the proportion of 1-bedroom flats to be excessive.
27. There would be some overlooking of No.63 Gog Magog Way from the small, first floor living room window in the southeast elevation of the flats building and from the first floor living room window in the northeast elevation of the flats building. However, given the small size and distance between the window in the southeast elevation and No.63's side boundary (17m) and the oblique view from the window in the northeast elevation, I do not consider this to constitute serious harm.
28. The Local Highway Authority confirms that the layout of the residential development is acceptable provided the 3 existing trees within the public highway on the opposite side/inside of the bend are removed in order to allow an uninterrupted view across the verge and thereby adequate vehicle-to-vehicle visibility.
29. A site to the west of the existing recreation ground/on the other side of Gog Magog Way from the site is allocated as an extension to the existing recreation ground in the Local Plan. However, it is understood that the College that owns it is not prepared to

make the land available for this purpose. A new football pitch is therefore to be generally welcomed and would be of benefit to local residents. However, the proposed site is not wholly acceptable. The absence of any additional parking or changing facilities and its orientation, whereby one of the goals would be directly behind and close to properties fronting Gog Magog Way, is of concern. An alternative location for a pitch as part of a scaled-down residential scheme, including parking and changing facilities should be explored.

30. In the absence of the results of a springtime survey of the site for the protected common lizard, I am not satisfied that the development would not adversely affect the habitat of protected species. I consider that a scheme of biodiversity enhancement could be secured by condition if the scheme was considered to be acceptable in all other respects.
31. The Parish Council has expressed concern as to the need for a guarantee that the housing will continue to be affordable and to ensure occupation by local people. If Members were minded to approve the application, a S.106 Agreement would ensure that they are 'affordable' in perpetuity and 'cascade provisions' would ensure that the units would be available for qualifying persons in Stapleford first.
32. It is with reluctance that I am recommending this application for refusal but consider the scheme to be unacceptable for the reasons set out above.

Recommendation

33. Refusal (as amended by drawing no. 04/960/PL.02 Rev.A date stamped 11.4.06 and drawing no. 04/960/PL.01 Rev.A date stamped 18.4.06)
 1. Due to the extent to which the proposed residential development intrudes in a northeasterly direction into the countryside and Green Belt and the height of the flats and houses, the proposed development would have an adverse affect on the rural character and openness of the landscape and Green Belt. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy GB2 which requires any development considered appropriate in the Green Belt to be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse affect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt, and Policies GB2(5) and HG8(4) which state that affordable housing as an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the plans must not damage the rural landscape.
 2. Whilst the proposed mix of dwellings is generally considered to meet the identified local need, the proposed inclusion of 8no. 1-bedroom flats and no 2-bedroom flats does not meet the identified local need. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policies GB2(5) and HG8(2) which state that affordable housing as an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the plans must strictly meet the identified local need.
 3. In the absence of the results of a springtime survey of the site for the protected common lizard, the Local Planning Authority has not been satisfied that the development would not adversely affect the habitat of a protected species. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy EN13 which states that the District Council will not grant planning permission for development which could adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, the habitats of animal species which are protected by law unless the need for the development clearly outweighs the importance of conserving that habitat.

4. Due to the absence of any additional dedicated parking or changing facilities and its orientation, whereby one of the goals would be directly behind and close to properties fronting Gog Magog Way, the proposed football pitch would result in an unacceptable level of disturbance and inconvenience to local residents and would not provide the necessary facilities for users. The proposal is therefore contrary to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy RT1 which states that the District Council will resist any recreation proposals which would have inadequate provision for parking and manoeuvring of cars.

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 file Refs: S/0442/06/F and S/1835/02/F

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