

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

7th February 2007

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Head of Planning Services

S/2236/06/F - STAPLEFORD
Erection of 13 Dwellings (including 4 Affordable Dwellings)
Green Hedges School, Bar Lane for Hill Residential Ltd

Recommendation: Approval

Date for Determination: 22nd February 2007 (Major Application)

Notes:

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because of the objections raised by Stapleford Parish Council and four local residents which do not accord with the Officer recommendation of approval.

Site and Proposal

1. The application relates to a 0.46 ha site, occupied by a single storey red brick school with 3 mobile classrooms. The school was vacated last year, the pupils transferring to a new school at Linton Village College. There are two vehicular access points from Bar Lane, and the forecourt is tarmaced for car parking. Within the site and adjoining its boundaries are a number of trees, including an overgrown hedge with trees along the Bar Lane frontage. To the north and west of the site are detached 2 storey properties, the latter having a substantial belt of trees adjacent to the site boundary. To the south is Stapleford Community Primary School, separated from the site by a private track and footpath. The eastern boundary is formed by Bar Lane with countryside beyond.
2. The full application, received on 23rd November 2006 and amended on 22nd January 2007, proposes the erection of nine detached houses and four affordable semi-detached houses, with three vehicular accesses from Bar Lane. The accommodation comprises 4 two bedroom affordable houses, 3 three bedroom, 4 four bedroom and 2 five bedroom houses. Ridge heights range from 8.5m to 9.5m and are predominantly 2 storey; 2 houses having accommodation in the roof space. Walls are a mixture of brick and render with slate and clay roof tiles.
3. A tree survey and landscaping scheme accompanying the application shows much of the Bar Lane vegetation and trees removed and replanted. An Ecology Assessment Report did not identify any significant habitats within the school grounds but recommended tree work should avoid the bird nesting and bat breeding seasons, and boxes should be provided for both species.
4. In the Design and Access Statement the applicants state the site layout integrates with existing development in Bar Lane, with six of the thirteen units having active frontages to the road which ensures the development will form part of the wider village rather than becoming an insular development. The main site access is flanked by two units designed to turn the corner into the site and also to mark the location of the site entrance. This is achieved by the inclusion of two rendered gable ends which are forward of the proposed building line and recall similar arrangements elsewhere

in Bar Lane. Plot 5 is orientated with its frontage parallel to the access road to act as an important vista stop at the end of the access road. All of the dwellings have architectural styles which compliment neighbouring properties and have reference to the surrounding village. In a number of locations around the site the need to protect existing trees or form new hedges have shaped the development, along with the need to address the patterns of development along Bar Lane which has been achieved by locating the larger houses to the north of the site and the smaller units to the south. All of the buildings are of traditional appearance with pitched roofs and chimneys, with a combination of cottage styles and more formal double fronted units. Many of the buildings are linked with garden walls to provide enclosure and courtyards to frame feature buildings.

5. The main access to the site will be a shared surface serving eight units. The site's previous use as a school will have generated a large volume of traffic at peak times of the day compared with the proposed use. The site has good footpath and cycle route links and disabled access around the site will be good. The site is relatively flat, aiding disabled access and each dwelling will have level access to the principal entrance door.
6. The overall density is 28 dwellings per ha.

Planning History

7. The school dates from the 1970's and there have been a number of permissions for extensions and mobile classrooms. An outline application for a 75 bedroom residential care home in 2006 was withdrawn.

Planning Policy

8. The following Policies of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 apply:

Policy P1/2 - Environmental Restrictions on Development - restricts development which could damage the biodiversity of an area.

Policy P1/3 - Sustainable Design in Built Development - requires a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development. New development should respond to the local character of the built environment.

Policy P5/3 - Density - states densities of 40 dwellings per ha should be sought. Densities of less than 30 dwellings per ha will not be acceptable.

Policy P5/5 - Homes in Rural Areas - states small scale housing developments will be permitted in villages only where appropriate, taking into account the need for affordable rural housing and the character of the village.

Policy P7/2 - Biodiversity - states all development will seek to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the areas which they effect.

9. The following policies of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 apply:

Policy SE2 designates Great Shelford and Stapleford as a Rural Growth Settlement. Development should be sensitive to the character of the village, local features of ecological importance and the amenities of neighbours. Development should provide an appropriate mix of dwellings in terms of size, type, and affordability and should

achieve a minimum density of 30 dwellings per ha unless there are strong design grounds for not doing so.

Policy SE8 states there will be a general presumption in favour of residential development within village frameworks.

Policy SE9 states development on the edges of villages should be sympathetically designed and landscaped to minimise the impact of development on the countryside.

Policy HG7 states that in settlements exceeding 3000 population, including Great Shelford and Stapleford, the Council should seek approximately 30% affordable housing before determining residential applications of more than 10 dwellings.

Policy HG10 requires residential development to contain a mix of units providing accommodation in a range of types, sizes (including 2 bedroom dwellings) and affordability. The design and layout of the schemes should be informed by the wider character and context of the local townscape. Schemes should also achieve a high quality of design and distinctiveness and promote energy efficiency.

Policy HG22 states the Council will look favourably upon residential schemes which include measures to conserve energy.

Policy EN5 requires the retention of trees and hedges wherever possible, together with landscaping schemes.

Policy EN12 states the Council will seek to retain features and habitat types of nature conservation value. Developers will be expected to provide appropriate mitigation measures where the reasons for development outweigh the retention of habitat.

Consultations (Pre-Amended Plans)

10. **Stapleford Parish Council** objects.

- "(a) Should be smaller, rather than larger, houses.
- (b) Doubt whether sufficient on-site parking.
- (c) Elevated terrace on Plot 5 potentially overlooks garden of 33 Bar Lane.
- (d) Roof windows in Plot 6 may overlook garden of 33 Bar Lane.
- (e) Inadequate parking for Plot 1.

If, however, the Committee is minded to give approval:

1. Measures should be taken to prevent overlooking from terrace of Plot 5 of the garden of 33 Bar Lane.
2. There should be confirmation that roof windows in Plot 6 do not overlook garden of 33 Bar Lane.
3. Delivery of materials should avoid times of beginning and end of school day.
4. Usual prohibition of hours of working in evenings and at weekends.

5. Every effort should be made to keep contractors' vehicles within the site.
6. Adequate street lighting should be ensured."

11. **The Chief Financial Officer (County Council)** comments:

There is not adequate accommodation available in the local primary school to meet the additional demand expected from the development and a financial contribution is required towards additional provision.

12. **The Senior Archaeologist (County Council)** states the site is located in an area of high archaeological potential and a Condition on any permission is requested requiring a programme of archaeological investigation.

13. **The Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** does not require further water supplies to be made available.

14. **The Architectural Liaison Officer (Cambridgeshire Constabulary)** has no observations other than that the main access road into the site should benefit from lighting by means of column mounted white downlighters to BS5489.

15. **The Council's Trees and Landscape Officer** has no objection to the removal of trees proposed. The TPO's sycamore within the grounds of 33 Bar Lane should be afforded protection using heras fencing or equivalent. Although the roots of the tree are compromised by the school playground, the Root Protection Area in accordance with BS5998 is 11.4m from the stem - this will also afford canopy protection. The existing playground should be removed using a lightweight breaker and not a JCB type machine to avoid root damage and any further modification of the area should be undertaken by hand, i.e. not using mechanical means.

16. **The Council's Landscape Design Officer** comments the scheme would work better with fewer houses. The existing mature hedgerows, trees and surrounding boundary landscape are very close to the proposed building. More clearance is required to the front boundary hedge if it is to be retained. Detailed advice is given on how this can be achieved and augmented with new planting, which should be native species.

Mature apple trees within the site could be retained with a revised layout. Large leylandii to the rear of Plots 1 and 4 should be removed. The wisdom of replanting memorial trees, originally planted in memory of former pupils, is questioned as it might not survive and is proposed in rear gardens. Rededication of new trees in a better position is recommended. The proposed planting of a cherry variety in Plots 5 and 6 is questioned.

17. **The Council's Ecologist** welcomes the ecological assessment submitted with the application. No bat roosts or great crested newts are likely to be found on the site. The small pond on site could be restored. The front hedge should not be removed, but "gapped up". The apple trees on site should be retained for their habitat. Conditions are suggested concerning the timing of vegetation removal, nest box provision, fence design to allow a degree of permeability for small animals, and bat roost provision.

18. The comments of **The Local Highway Authority, The Chief Environmental Health Officer, The Waste Disposal Officer** and **The Housing Manager** will be reported verbally, as will comments from consultees upon the amended plans.

Representations (Pre-Amended Plans)

19. Objections have been received from the two neighbours who adjoin the site, a neighbour whose house is accessed by the track along the site's southern boundary and an architect based in Babraham.

Taking the objections individually:

1. 51 Bar Lane (adjoining to the north)
 - (a) Clarification sought of ground levels, floor levels and ridge heights to Plot 1. Believe proposed house would be considerably higher than No. 51 which seems unreasonable and unacceptable.
 - (b) Development comes forward of the existing Bar Lane building line and house proposed on Plot 1 will be 8m forward of No. 51 and 2m from its boundary which will be overbearing. It will block natural light to the sitting room and be visible from the room.
 - (c) Plot 1 has inadequate visibility splays.
 - (d) Overlooking of the rear garden to No. 51 will be experienced from the 1st floor rear windows proposed for the dwelling on Plot 4, giving visibility into the glass roofed conservatory. Consideration should be given to turning Plot 4 around to avoid overlooking.
2. 33 Bar Lane (Adjoining to the west)
 - (a) The house on Plot 5 includes at least 5 windows and a balcony on the first floor facing No. 33. There is a direct line of sight from each into No. 33, which will be intrusive. The garden will also be overlooked. The windows should be obscure glass and the balcony scrapped.
 - (b) Similar concerns about the roof windows in Plot 3 (sic Plot 6). It is not clear if there will be overlooking. Reassurance that there will be no overlooking is sought and opaque glass requested.
 - (c) The loss of the school's heated swimming pool facility. This was available to Stapleford and surrounding villages, particularly the elderly and arthritic, for whom it was part of their weekly therapy.
3. 35 Bar Lane
 - (a) Clarification sought about what is to be done about the loss of the swimming pool. The owner's 2 eldest children, along with many others, learned to swim in the pool. Parkside in Cambridge and the pool in Sawston are now the nearest facilities. It is unjust that a facility should be taken away from the village with no form of compensation.
 - (b) The timing of the application just before Christmas does not give local residents time to consider the application.
4. Babraham Architect
 - (a) The mixture of affordable and larger houses will be a useful asset to the village.

- (b) There are two more houses on the scheme than the site can comfortably cope with.
 - (c) Several houses only have a garage and one parking space and this is insufficient for families who are likely to have more than one car and use the garage as a store. The larger houses are likely to need 3 spaces.
 - (d) The small access road cannot accommodate residents parking their cars off plot and will block delivery and emergency vehicles. Parking will also occur on Bar Lane because of inadequate provision.
 - (e) 8 metre long back gardens for some plots with large houses is minimal in the extreme.
20. Any representations in regard to the amended plans will be reported verbally.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

21. The key issues are the impact of the design and layout on the character of Bar Lane and the amenities of neighbouring residents.
22. The development of the site has been subject to extensive pre-application discussions with the applicants since the school came on the market. Schemes for smaller as well as greater numbers of houses have been tabled for consideration, as well as the withdrawn application for a residential care home last year.
23. I consider the scheme in its amended form is well designed, both in terms of layout, house types and landscaping and will provide an attractive addition to the Bar Lane street scene, as well as four affordable houses for the village. The existing school is a utilitarian design and the site has an unkempt appearance, particularly the overgrown former field boundary hedge along its frontage.
24. Following further discussions with officers during the course of the application, the amended plans also addressed the concerns of neighbours, the Landscapes and Ecology Officers, and improvements to the mix and layout of the scheme requested by the Case Officer.
25. The neighbour to the north (No. 51) has concerns that the house on Plot 1 will be overbearing because it is set forward of his property and has a higher ridge line. However, the proposed house has a lower 6.5m high element facing No. 51 which reduces its impact. The proposed house on Plot 4 has been moved a further 1.0m from the boundary with No. 51, giving a separation of between 10.6-12.00m. This coupled with the retention of existing trees near the boundary, reinforced with new screen planting, lessens the likelihood of overlooking.
26. The neighbour to the west (No. 33) has a substantial trees plantation along the boundary of the site which provides an effective screen. Nevertheless, the applicants have agreed to delete the balcony proposed on Plot 5 and remove one of the roof lights in the rear roof slope of Plot 6, although these windows will not allow overlooking of the property.
27. Following a site meeting with officers it was agreed the house frontage on Plot 9 should be set back further to allow sufficient room for new hedge planting. The existing artificial pond is to be replaced in a different location. The existing apple tree is to be removed and its cut branches and trunk retained as a hibernium to the rear of

the new pond. Native trees are to be substituted for the ornamental varieties proposed.

28. The houses on Plots 3 and 9 have been redesigned as smaller 3 bedroom units, which improves the overall mix and provides for a more open streetscape on the main access road with more space between dwellings.
29. The overall density at 28 dwellings per ha falls just below the 30 dwellings per ha target. I have discussed with the applicants increasing the density but they are reluctant to do so stating that retaining the green frontage and other boundary vegetation reduces the development area. Whilst not totally convinced by this argument, I am satisfied the scale of the development is appropriate for this village edge site which is surrounded by low density development featuring large detached houses in extensive gardens. Local Plan Policy SE2 for Rural Growth Settlements does caveat 30 dwelling per ha as a minimum density “unless there are strong design grounds for not doing so,” which I consider is the case with this site.
30. The Parish Council objection reiterates the neighbours concerns. In a separate letter received on 18th January 2007 the Parish set out a proposal for a financial contribution from the Developer towards a new pavilion on the recreation ground. This would be in lieu of the facilities lost with the demolition of the school building. The Parish Council states the school hall and pool were available for hire. The Annual Parish Meeting was held in the hall and it was a regular meeting place for Guides, Brownies, the Women’s Institute, and an out-of-school club, as well as for table tennis, line dancing, yoga, aromatherapy and the occasional jumble sale. The pool has been regularly hired, every day of the week including weekends, by a variety of children’s and adults’ groups. Sawston Village College used the pool 3 mornings a week. The School has been a community asset that was widely appreciated.
31. A discussion has taken place between the Parish Council and the Developer concerning a new pavilion, which would include a meeting room the same size as the school hall. Its estimated cost would be £300,000, with £50,000 agreed from SCDC and £50,000 from the Parish Council. It is suggested the Developer could contribute £100,000 and the Parish would raise the remaining £100,000 by loan.
32. I have spoken to the Developers about this proposal. At their meeting with the Parish Council almost a year ago an indication was given that a contribution might be forthcoming towards the pavilion, but at the time it was not thought any affordable housing needed to be provided. This has affected the financial viability of the scheme. The Developer is still prepared to discuss a contribution towards the pavilion but as a separate matter from the planning application. I agree that it would be unreasonable to insist that the Developer enter into a Section 106 agreement to make a financial contribution to the Parish Council given the fact that the closure of the school was based on educational considerations unconnected with the Developer.
33. The Parish Council also has concerns about conflict between construction traffic and the peak hour traffic movements associated with the neighbouring primary school. This is a site management issue which is best dealt with by covering letter.
34. I have discussed with the Developers the installation of solar panels on some plots to improve the sustainability of the scheme. I understand this is acceptable, although no details are shown on the amended plans. I propose a condition to cover this aspect of the scheme.

Recommendation

35. Approval, subject to amended plans franked 22nd January 2007, and conditions concerning:
1. Standard Condition A – Time limited permission (RcA);
 2. Sc5a – Details of materials for buildings, free standing walls, roadways and drives. (Rc5a (ii));
 3. Sc51 – Landscaping scheme (Rc51);
 4. Sc52 – Implementation of landscaping (Rc52);
 5. Protection of trees during construction; (Rc56)
 6. Sc66 Archaeological Investigation (Rc66);
 7. The development shall not begin until a scheme for the provision of affordable housing as part of the development has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The affordable housing shall be provided in accordance with the approved scheme. The scheme shall include:
 - (i) The timing of the construction of the affordable housing;
 - (ii) The arrangements to ensure that such provision is affordable for both initial and subsequent occupiers of the affordable housing; and
 - (iii) The occupancy criteria to be used for determining the identity of prospective and successive occupiers of the affordable housing, and the means by which such occupancy shall be enforced.

(Reason - To ensure the provision of affordable housing in accordance with Policy P5/5 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policy HG7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)
 8. Requirement for an educational contribution; (Reason - To provide additional accommodation for the primary school to meet the additional demand expected to be created by the development.)
 9. Hours of work condition during the period of construction re. power driven equipment; (Reason - To protect the amenity of neighbouring residents.)
 10. Scheme for the provision of solar energy; (Reason - To improve the sustainability of the scheme in accordance with Policy P1/3 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policy HG22 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)
 11. Precise details of the proposed windows shall be submitted for the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority. The work shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details; (Reason - To ensure the details of the development are satisfactory.)
 12. Provision of bird boxes; (Reason - To improve the biodiversity of the site in accordance with Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policies EN12 and EN13 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)

13. Provision of bat roosts; (Reason - To improve the biodiversity of the site in accordance with Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policies EN12 and EN13 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)
14. No tree/hedge clearance during bird nesting/bat breeding season; (Reason - To improve the biodiversity of the site in accordance with Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policies EN12 and EN13 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)
15. Details of pond construction; (Reason - To improve the biodiversity of the site in accordance with Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and Policies EN12 and EN13 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)

+ any conditions required by the Local Highways Authority and the Chief Environmental Health Officer.

Informatives

1. Legal agreement informative.
2. Environmental Health Officer Informatives.
3. Ecology Officer re fencing.
4. Trees Officer informative re: breaking up hardstanding near TPO'd sycamore.

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:**
 - P1/2** (Environmental Restrictions on Development)
 - P1/3** (Sustainable Design in Built Development)
 - P5/3** (Density)
 - P5/5** (Homes in Rural Areas)
 - P7/2** (Biodiversity)
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:**
 - SE2** (Development in Rural Growth Settlements)
 - SE8** (Village Frameworks)
 - SE9** (Village Edges)
 - HG7** (Affordable Housing on Sites within Village Frameworks)
 - HG10** (Housing Mix and Design)
 - HG22** (Energy Conservation)
 - EN5** (The Landscaping of New Development)
 - EN12** (Nature Conservation)
2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - The impact of the design and layout on the character of Bar Lane
 - The effect on the amenities of neighbouring residents

+ Letter re. need to discuss deliveries with adjacent school

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 Ref: S/2236/06/F

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