

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

10th January 2007

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Head of Planning Services

S/2064/06/F - BARRINGTON
Erection of 16 New Affordable Dwellings, Phase 2, Primes Close, for Granta Housing Association

Recommendation: To Defer

Date for Determination: 26th January 2007 (Major Development)

Notes:

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because it is an application for an exception site for affordable housing outside the village framework.

Members will visit this site on Monday 8th January 2007

Site and Proposal

1. Primes Close, Barrington is currently a group of eight affordable dwellings to the south of Shepreth Road. The original development has a single point of access, retaining the existing frontage hedge. A field gate at the southern end of the development allows access to the existing set-aside agricultural land.
2. This full application, received on 27th October 2006, proposes the erection of 16 affordable dwellings on a 0.55ha area of land to the south east of the existing development, accessed at the point of the existing field gate.
3. The development comprises four pairs of semi-detached houses. Six of these dwellings are 2-bedroom and two are 3-bedroom. In addition there is a block of four 1-bedroom flats and four part single storey, part two storey 2-bedroom properties. A total of 29 car parking spaces are provided. The density equates to 29 dwellings per hectare.
4. The full two storey dwellings have ridge heights that vary between 8.0m and 8.3m. The part single storey, part two-storey block has a maximum ridge height of 6.7m.
5. Materials proposed are brick and tiles.
6. Ten of the dwellings are proposed for rent and 6 for shared ownership.
7. To the north east of the site is the garden of 19 Shepreth Road, a detached house sited close to the main road. There is a reasonable amount of screening along the boundary of the garden with the application site. To the south west is land associated with The Windmill, which again benefits from existing planting.
8. To the south east of the site the open land slopes away towards the river. To the north west the site adjoins the rear of the existing Primes Close development.

9. The site itself slopes from north west to south east towards the river.
10. The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and a Design and Access Statement.
11. The site is outside the village framework, although it adjoins it on its north east boundary.
12. For Members information a planning application has recently been submitted for 40 affordable dwellings on land off Challis Green Barrington, which will be considered at a later meeting.

Planning History

13. A similar application (**Ref: S/2059/05/F**) was withdrawn in November 2005 to allow the applicant to resolve a number of matters, including the need for a Flood Risk Assessment.
14. Planning consent was granted for the eight original affordable dwellings in Primes Close in July 2000 (**Ref: S/2087/99/F**).

Planning Policy

15. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") restricts development in the countryside unless it can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular location.
16. **Policy P5/5** of the Structure Plan states that small-scale housing developments will be permitted in villages only where appropriate and having regard to the need for affordable rural housing.
17. **Policy P7/2** of the Structure Plan states that all development will seek to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the areas that they affect.
18. **Policy SE4** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") identifies Barrington as a group village where residential development is normally restricted to a maximum of 8 dwellings on sites within the village framework, subject to specified criteria, although exceptionally a development of up to 15 dwellings may be permitted where it would make best use of a brownfield site.
19. **Policy ST/6b** of the Local Development Framework – Core Strategy repeats that designation.
20. **Policy SE8** of the Local Plan states that residential development outside village frameworks will not normally be permitted.
21. **Policy HG8** of the Local Plan states that as an exception to the normal operation of the policies of the 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 sets out a range of criteria that need to be met including a requirement that the site 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 and; the development does not damage the character of the village or the rural landscape.

22. The Local Development Framework Submission Draft 2006 **Policy HG/5** rehearses the criteria of Policy HG8 but adds that a site should be well related to facilities and services within the village.
23. **Policy CS2** of the Local Plan states that planning permission will not be granted where there are inadequate water supply, sewerage or land drainage systems to meet the anticipated demands of the development.
24. **Policy CS5** of the Local Plan states that planning permission will not be granted where the site is liable to flooding, or where development is likely to increase the risk of flooding elsewhere by materially impeding the flow or storage of floodwater; increase flood risk in other areas downstream due to additional surface water runoff; or increase the number of people or properties at risk, unless it is demonstrated that these effects can be overcome by appropriate alleviation and mitigation measures.
25. **Policy EN2** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will not permit development which has an adverse effect on the wildlife, landscape and countryside character of the river valleys of South Cambridgeshire.
26. **Policy EN9** of the Local Plan seeks to protect County Wildlife sites.
27. **Policy EN13** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will not grant planning permission for development which could adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, the habitat of protected species.
28. **Policy EN45** of the Local Plan states that there is a general presumption against development which will have an adverse environmental impact on the water environment, nature conservation, fisheries and water-related recreation.
29. **Policy RT2** of the Local Plan sets out standards for public open space provision in new developments.

Consultation

30. **Barrington Parish Council** recommends approval. "The Public Meeting held on 19.11.06, at which Granta Housing Society was represented, brought forward concerns about an on-site play area provision, sewage disposal capacity, and speed of traffic. An almost unanimous concern was that houses should be allocated to those with a link to our village."
31. The **Development Officer** supports the application and the mix and tenure accord with previous discussions.
32. The **Affordable Housing Panel** has no objection in principle to the use of this site for affordable housing. It accepts that outstanding issues identified later in the report need to be satisfactorily resolved, including that of scale. It has confirmed that there is a need for an up to date housing needs survey to see whether the development of both this and the Challis Green site can be justified (in terms of housing need). It is of the view that both this and the Challis Green application should be determined at the same time.
33. The **Ecology Officer**, although not completely against some form of development in this location, objects to the current submission on the basis that it makes no provision for biodiversity.

34. The edge of the development site is approx 50m from the River Rhee which is designated as a County Wildlife Site. It is felt that the current proposal will result in more disturbance of the Rhee corridor. Otters regularly use the Rhee and its tributaries, the maintenance of undisturbed high quality environments is important for the otter. Thus some form of mitigation should be provided on land outside of the current application site.
35. The applicant provides no form of mitigation other than a standard hedge. Potential mitigation could include management of the existing hedge/scrub belt, sensitive planting of new willows, an existing shelf on the riverbank could be planted to form a small reed bed. Strong boundary planting is required to prevent people from wandering outside of the site where they will cause disturbance in otherwise presently quite countryside.
36. The SCDC Biodiversity Strategy identifies the River Rhee corridor as an area for Countryside Enhancement, this application does nothing to contribute to the overall local environment. Perhaps a funding contribution should be made to the Barrington Conservation Trust whom the Ecology Officer is currently working with to help restore riverside meadows.
37. The discharge from the site also gives concern about impact upon water quality. The development should incorporate SUDS to improve the quality of any run-off before it enters the Rhee. SUDS could provide for habitat creation opportunities that would complement the river setting.
38. It is noted that the current application retains a turning head that could allow for a phase 3. The Ecology Officer states that he would be very concerned if that happened. The retention of natural grasslands along the Rhee corridor is important to assist with the recovery of the local barn owl population (boxes have been provided locally). This application should provide for their management not leave opportunities for further development.
39. The objections are supported by LP policies EN2 (river valleys), EN9 (nature conservation identified sites), EN13 (protected species) and EN45 (water environment). Furthermore the Structure Plan policy P7/2-biodiversity seeks conservation and enhancement which this application does not deliver. PPS9 also sets high standards which this current application does not meet.
40. The **Trees and Landscapes Officer** states that no landscaping details are included in the proposal. In light of the comments from the Ecology Officer it is suggested that landscaping details are agreed prior to consent.
41. **Cambridgeshire Archaeology** states that its records indicate that the site lies in an area of some archaeological potential, situated on the edge of the former Saxon green, which has been suggested was an important settlement focus. Accordingly, it is possible that the plot contains important archaeological remains which could shed significant light on the development of the village in the mid to late Saxon and Medieval period.
42. It requests that a negative condition securing a programme of archaeological investigation be attached to any consent.
43. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests a conditions restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the construction process, and requiring an investigation of the site to establish the nature and extent of any contamination along with any remedial works that are found to be necessary.

44. He requests that informatives be attached to any consent in respect of the use of driven pile foundations use of bonfires and the burning of waste.
45. The **Architectural Liaison Officer, Cambridgeshire Constabulary** comments that the application fails to address some of the concerns expressed at the time of the earlier application and changes in the layout of the flats creates further difficulties. As a result he is not sure that he can fully endorse the applicants statement that the overall design of the site layout is generally in accordance with the Secured by Design recommendations.
46. In respect of plots 9-12 he states that the front doors of the dwellings are set back too far from the road to benefit from natural surveillance. This is compounded both by the screening provided by the "L" shape of the building footprint and height of the front garden fence. As these dwellings are described as bungalows it is not unreasonable to assume that they may be occupied by elderly/vulnerable residents and thus there is a significant danger of them falling prey to distraction burglars or rogue traders.
47. It is understood that the layout is, to some extent, dictated by the desire to create what are, in effect, rear gardens to the front of Plots 9-12 because of the nature of the land to the rear. It is generally accepted however that dwellings are often at their most vulnerable to attack from the rear and it is felt to be misguided to incorporate rear of dwelling features into the front of the bungalows. The Secured by Design New Homes Guide makes it clear that for the majority of housing developments, it will be desirable for dwelling frontages to be kept open to view, so walls, fences and hedges will need to be kept low.
48. Parking associated with this part of the development is poorly overlooked. The seven on street parking places to the front of plots 9-12 are only overlooked from the kitchen/diner window, without surveillance from front doors or living rooms. The car park (spaces 11-16) is overlooked only by a bathroom window and wc window. It should also be noted that parking spaces 24-27, adjacent to the flats, have no generally occupied living room in the flats overlooking the area with natural surveillance further restricted by what appears to be a storage facility limiting views from the direction of plot 8.
49. The comments of the **Environment Agency** will be reported at the meeting, however prior to the submission of the application, it wrote to the applicants Consulting Engineers stating that in principle the flood risk assessment was acceptable and that it satisfactorily incorporated phases 1 and 2. It indicated that it was likely to request that conditions be attached to any consent requiring the submission of a scheme for the provision of surface drainage works along with a scheme for the provision of maintenance of the surface water balancing system for the lifetime of the development.
50. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requests that adequate provision is made for the provision of fire hydrants through a planning condition.
51. The comments of the **Local Highway Authority**, the **Environment Operations Manager** and **Anglian Water** will be reported at the meeting.

Representations

52. At the time of writing the report 9 letters of objection had been received. The grounds of objection are summarised below:

53. The site is outside the village framework. The application contradicts the Local Plan and is in breach of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as it does not demonstrate that there are good reasons for a departure. Has the Secretary of State for the Environment been notified?
54. Are there different criteria for schemes of affordable housing?
55. The Urban Capacity Study has demonstrated sufficient capacity in the region.
56. The Local Development Framework confirms that there is no need for additional housing allocation in the rural area and this has recently been cited to refuse an application in Shepreth Road.
57. The proposed development would be contrary to the search sequence in Policy P1/1 and Policy P5/5 of the Structure Plan 2003, Policy CSR1 of the East of England Plan and, Policy HG8 of the Local Plan 2004.
58. Policy ST/6 (Local Development Framework – Core Strategy) restricts Barrington to group development (See Policy Section above). This land is greenfield and yet the proposal exceeds the highest threshold for brownfield. Were phase 2 completed Primes Close would be a single development of 24 dwellings. The 8 dwellings maximum has been a planning tool in successive South Cambs Planning Strategies which was intended to reverse the historic and unsustainable policy of development in villages which cannot provide for residents daily needs. Larger developments would be contrary to the development strategy for the rural area. These limits can be circumvented by using phased developments, which would be the case here, but which would defeat the object of Policy ST/6. Phase 2 should be no more than 8 dwellings.
59. Policy Barrington 2 of the Local Plan states that the District Council will resist any encroachment south of the Green towards the river in order to retain the important rural character of this part of the village.
60. Policy DP1 (Local Development Framework – Development Control Policies) requires the submission of a Sustainability Appraisal and Health Impact Assessment for major developments. Has this been complied with?
61. Policy HG/5 para 4 requires that exception sites for Affordable Housing should be well related to facilities and services. Policy ST/b states that development will be located where it will provide the opportunity. This development is on the fringe of the village and its relationship to facilities could hardly be worse. Primes Close is almost the furthest point for the primary school, major employment (Cemex, The Hall and community facilities such as the football pitch, recreation areas and the church, all of which are between 1300m-1600m away. The village shop is 900m. There is one bus service morning and evening and therefore realistically the majority of journeys will be by car, which is not compatible with these policies
62. The number of houses proposed exceeds the local need. The original 8 dwellings could not be filled locally. The so-called 'Village Plan' is incomplete and not approved or published yet the Parish Council is wrongly citing a quantified need that cannot be confirmed by Granta.
63. One letter accepts that there is a need for the houses but to build so many houses so far away from the amenities that exist in the village i.e. the post office and school will result in more traffic and danger.

64. The proposed development is too crowded into too small an area. There must be pockets of land throughout the village which could be utilised for low cost housing, allowing the tenants to be integrated into the community rather than isolated on the edge of it.
65. Employment in the village is limited and public transport is poor. Surely this is essential for an affordable housing project?
66. The ecology of the site is very fragile.
67. The scale and density of the development (when added to the 8 existing dwellings) will significantly damage the character of the village, the rural landscape and the environment.
68. The only reason that the development can begin to be considered is that it is for 'affordable housing'. It would make a mockery of the planning process and system to use this as justification for ignoring the many detrimental effects of the proposal.
69. Anglian Water has confirmed in a letter dated February 2006 that the foul drainage system suffers from capacity problems during wet weather but the letter was only valid for 6 months. No current statement has been provided.
70. Part of the site is liable to flooding. Development would therefore appear to be against Policy CS5, which states "planning permission will not be granted for development where the site is liable to flooding." There will be a significant increase in surface water run off flows caused by the proposed new surface water drainage for the site and there do not appear to be any measures in place to reduce pollutants entering the drainage.
71. The Environment Agency was not happy with the treatment of surface water and sewage from the first phase. The present sewage system is overloaded and all new building should be stopped until the system is enlarged. There will be flooding. Contaminated water should not be discharged into the River Rhee or Cam
72. No proposal has been submitted for renewable energy and no reason is given.
73. Open space is required on developments over 21 units but none is shown. Gardens backing onto the river could be hazardous
74. 6 units are allocated as shared ownership which may soon become unaffordable housing when a tenant owns 75% at open market prices.
75. The design of the buildings is standardised for cost savings and not in keeping with open countryside, which should be protected by Part 1 of the Local Plan.
76. Traffic along Shepreth Road travels over the 40mph limit and the extra traffic from this proposal will increase accident risk. The speed limit should be reduced to 30mph. Shepreth Road has a single-track bridge with a long blind bend at one end and a blind T-junction at the other. Essential improvements need to be made
77. Policy NE6 (Local Development Framework – Development Control Policies) requires applicants to provide an adequate level of survey information to establish the impact of development on protected species, priority species or habitat and put forward possible alternatives, mitigation schemes and/or compensation measures. The edge of the site is about 50m from the river Cam/Rhee (a County Wildlife Site). Otters (Biodiversity Action Plan species) and Kingfishers (Schedule 1) are definitely present.

Have the effects of noise/high lighting/pets from the development itself and extra traffic from 30 cars along the important wildlife corridor between the river/chalk stream been considered?

78. PPG 3 Housing at Annexe B (Providing for rural exception housing) states that the basis of this policy is essentially one of permitting very limited exceptions to established policies of restraint. This development, which is inconsistent with so many core planning objectives is not an example of 'permitting very limited exceptions.'
79. The occupier of The Windmill, to the west of the site, objects on personal grounds (as well as some of the above points) to the noise pollution from excessive road traffic movements. There is an existing problem with screaming children which can only be intensified and will affect the quiet rural nature of this area. There is now an established otter hide nearby on the river which leads to the adjacent nature reserve. If, despite the objections, the Council is minded to approve the application there should be tree planting on the south and west boundaries. Trees should be at least 3m high and include 25% evergreen for winter screening. The farm gates to the rear field should be close boarded, a minimum of 1.5 metres high and locked to prevent children and others climbing and trespassing by the river.
80. A more suitable site for affordable housing exists off Challis Green, east of Barrington School.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

81. The key issues for Members to consider with this application are whether the proposal complies with Policies HG7 and HG8 of the Local Plan. Although the site is outside the village framework Policy HG8 allows an exception to be made to the operation of the normal policies of the Local Plan for schemes of 100% affordable housing designed to meet identified local housing needs. Equally this exception applies to the scale of development where appropriate. It is important however that any proposal demonstrates that it complies with the criteria set out in Policy HG8 in respect of meeting an identified local need; securing arrangements for ensuring that the affordable housing provided is retained in perpetuity for this identified housing need (Policy HG7); that the site 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 and; the development does not damage the character of the village or the rural landscape. In addition the proposal needs to be judged against other matters raised during the course of the application, in particular those of foul and surface water drainage (Policies CS3 and CS5 of the Local Plan), Nature Conservation (Policies EN2, EN9, EN13 and EN45 of the Local Plan and Policy P7/2 of the Structure Plan); highway safety.
82. It is my view that in considering this application Members should also have regard to the recently submitted planning application for 40 affordable dwellings at Challis Green, in so far as the overall need for affordable dwellings in Barrington is concerned.
83. The Development Manager supports the application and has agreed the mix and tenure with the applicant prior to the submission of the application. There is an identified need for affordable housing in the village, which will not be met in total by this submission. The current housing need survey for Barrington dates from 2002, although the Parish Council has undertaken a further survey as part of its Village Plan. The Affordable Housing Panel has confirmed the need for a more up to date housing need and this work is to be put in hand.

84. The traditional pattern of development at this end of the village is linear in form. The proposal to develop in depth to the rear of the original eight dwellings in Primes Close will alter this character. The north east and south west boundaries of the site benefit from existing boundary planting within the grounds of the adjacent properties, which will help to minimise this impact. However, the south east boundary, towards the river, is currently open. Long distance views of the rear of the development are likely to be obtained on the approach to Barrington from the south out of Shepreth. The submitted plan shows provision for a 5m wide planting strip on this boundary. It is my view that a group of eight dwellings could be more comfortably assimilated into this part of the village than the fifteen proposed.
85. The layout proposed shows the dwellings on Plots 7-10 being within 10m of the rear gardens of existing properties in Primes Close. In my view this relationship is unfortunate in terms of the degree of overlooking of the rear gardens of those existing properties that will result, with consequent loss of privacy to occupiers. In my view a rearrangement of parking spaces would allow these dwellings to be moved further from the boundary. At the present time parking spaces 11-16 and 17-22 are of inadequate depth and unusable. These matters have been taken up with the applicant's agent.
86. The comments of the Architectural Liaison Officer, Cambridgeshire Constabulary have been reported to the applicant's agent.
87. The Ecology Officer has commented that he is unable to support the application at the current time due to potential impact of the development on nature conservation and biodiversity issues. These matters have also been raised in several of the letters of representation and will need to be satisfactorily addressed if development of this site is to be supported. The application states that existing tree belts and shrubs will in the main be retained and that therefore the main loss to biodiversity will be in the loss of part of the existing field. New shrub and tree planting will be mostly native species to provide more opportunities than the existing open field for bird and insect life. It states that the new homes will have covered porches and roof overhangs which will provide nesting opportunities for birds and small gaps will be left in hedges to allow wildlife corridors for small mammals. These comments do not however address the wider concerns of the Ecology Officer.
88. I am awaiting the comments of the Environment Agency on the current application. However it has been in discussions with the applicant prior to submission and has agreed in principle a flood risk assessment. The site itself is not in the identified flood plain. However surface water disposal in particular will be important. I will report the further comments of the Environment Agency at the meeting.
89. The comments of Anglian Water will be reported at the meeting and it is important that it confirms that there is sufficient capacity to cater for the proposed development.
90. The comments of the Local Highway Authority will be reported at the meeting. However it did not raise an objection in principle to the previous application but required detailed alterations to the internal layout of the site.
91. Reference has been made in letters of representations to the proposal being contrary to the aims of Local Plan Policy Barrington 2 which resists further encroachment south of the Green towards the river. The application site is at the western edge of Barrington village and is not opposite the Green and I am therefore of the view that this particular policy is not directly relevant although, as stated above, it is still

important to assess the impact of the development on the character of the village and the rural landscape.

92. Policy DP1 of the Local Development Framework, referred to in a letter of representation, and requiring a Sustainability Appraisal and Health Impact Assessment to be carried out carries limited weight as a policy at the current time. However both these matters are items that are included in the standard planning application form for major developments. The applicants have submitted a statement on Sustainable Design in the Design and Access Statement. As its name suggests it refers to construction methods rather than any wider issue of sustainability. It states that the houses will be as sustainable as possible with the main construction material for the walls, upper floors and roofs being from timber obtained from FSC sources. External finishes will be facing brickwork, with concrete tiles, all of which are given A ratings in the Green Guide to Housing Specifications. It states that the designs will also achieve a 'very good' eco Homes rating. In my view a Health Impact Assessment is not required for this scale and type of application.
93. The site is well related to the built up part of the village, being adjacent to it on its west boundary, but, by virtue of it being outside the village framework any development will potentially be more remote from established village services. In this case it is particularly unfortunate that the School is located at the east end of the village. Letters of representation have stated that the affordable housing should be more integrated on a number of sites around the village and one letter refers to the alternative piece of land off Challis Green, which is felt to be better located to existing facilities.
94. This application is under the threshold required (21 dwellings or more) for the provision of public open space, but Members should note that cumulative development of 24 dwellings should include open space (Policy RT2 of the Local Plan 2004).
95. Members will be able to view this site and assess the potential impact in the countryside along with other matters raised.
96. At the present time there are a number of outstanding site specific issues highlighted above which will need to be satisfactorily resolved before I am able to recommend that Members support development of this site for affordable housing. I am of the view however that, whilst each application should be considered on its merits, this proposal should be considered alongside the recently submitted application on land off Challis Green in terms of the housing needs of Barrington. Whilst I will ask Members to take a view on the details of this application I will recommend that any final decision be deferred.

Recommendations

97. I will report the comments of outstanding consultees and will ask that Members indicate whether support for development of this site for affordable housing can be considered in principle, provided that the issues of countryside impact (which includes the scale of development), foul and surface water drainage, nature conservation and biodiversity can be satisfactorily addressed, along with the required revisions to the layout of the scheme referred to above.
98. However, I will recommend to Members that any final decision on the application be deferred so that this proposal can be considered alongside the planning application for 40 affordable dwellings on land off Challis Green in terms of how the overall need for affordable housing in Barrington is addressed.

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
- Local Development Framework – Core Strategy
- Planning File Refs: S/2064/06/F; S/2059/05/F and S/2087/99/F

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