

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 5th January 2005
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/2128/04/F - Landbeach
**Redevelopment of Mobile Home Park to Provide 16 Retirement Mobile Units and
Excavation of Amenity Lake, Bluebell Wood Caravan Site, and Land Adjoining, Ely
Road, for David Charles Ltd**

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 14th December 2004

Site and Proposal

1. An irregular shaped site of 1.85 hectares on the western side of Ely Road, approximately 400m north of the Landbeach Road/A10 ("Slap Up" P.H.) junction. Between the site and the A10 is a loose ribbon of pre-war housing whilst to the rear is a collection of lakes used for fishing.
2. The site is in two sections. A 7.0m wide driveway adjacent the northernmost house, "Hayburnwyke", gives access to a "loop-road" around which are 5 mobile homes; there is a large gravelled parking area. The second part of the site lies to the south-west of the mobile homes and is mainly willow/willow scrub and other trees, the land having been excavated for gravel in the past.
3. The full application, received on 19th October 2004 proposes the redevelopment of the current 5 mobile homes site to provide a total of 16 mobile homes.
4. The treed area would be partly excavated to provide an amenity lake, with the excavated spoil being re-modelled on site to bring the site levels up close to neighbouring land.

History

5. The applicants purchased the site in the early 1990's with the benefit of two earlier consents, one for two caravans, another for three. The site was laid out and brought up to a modern-day standard. Consent was granted in 1996 for a small site office. In 1997 consent for a bungalow was refused, and again in 1998. The subsequent appeal was dismissed.

Policy

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:

- i) **Policy P1/2 – Environmental Restrictions on Development.** This policy restricts new development in the countryside and also seeks to protect the loss of areas of biodiversity value.
- ii) **Policy P1/3 - Sustainable Design in Built Development.** This policy seeks to minimise the need to travel and reduce car dependency.

- iii) **Policy P7/2 – Biodiversity.** Development will seek to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the area. Features will be retained, managed and enhanced.
- iv) **P9/2a) – Green Belt.** Aims to preserve the setting of the city of Cambridge and retain the openness of the Green Belt. New development will be severely limited.

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004:

- i) **SE8 – Village Frameworks,** restricts housing development to within village frameworks.
- ii) **HG19 – Sub-division of mobile homes.** Any approval for a mobile will be conditioned “no sub-division”.
- iii) **GB1 – The setting and special character of Cambridge** will be protected by a Green Belt.
- iv) **GB2 – Inappropriate development** will not be permitted unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.
- v) **EN8 – Natural Areas.** Consent will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on nature conservation and ecology of an area.
- vi) **EN12 – Nature Conservation – Unidentified Areas.** Retention of features and habitat types of nature conservation value.
- vii) **TP1 – Aims,** amongst other matters, to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

Consultations

Landbeach Parish Council supports the scheme, stating:

- 6. “The Council has no objections to the proposals put forward in the planning application providing, as stated, that same number of persons will be living on the complex, it would concern us if numbers were greatly increased due to the access onto the busy A10 road. Mr Birch has always maintained this site to a high standard and we would like to think will do so in the future.
- 7. We understand there is a need for the type of properties proposed for retirement couples who down size from their existing houses. We would like to see the section 106 agreement imposed as a planning condition as it will ensure that the correct age group 55 years and above will reside in these premises.
- 8. Bluebell Woods is an area of natural historical (sic. historic) interest and we would therefore like any work undertaken on the site to be sympathetic.”
- 9. **Waterbeach Parish Council** also supports the application, stating that conditions should be imposed restricting single occupancy per unit, and no commercial use of lake which would increase the amount of traffic. The Highway Authority should be consulted.
- 10. The comments of **The Local Highway Authority** will be reported verbally.

11. **The Environment Agency** has no objections but requests conditions on any approval requiring details of both foul and surface water drainage to be submitted and agreed.
12. **The Old West Internal Drainage Board** is concerned for the control of water levels within the lake and possible effects on adjacent properties. Further information is required in this respect, plus details of surface water disposal. The applicant's agent has replied to the Internal Drainage Board stating that water levels are controlled by gravity as the whole site lies within a gravel strata. Surface water from all "hard" areas drains through the hardcore sub-base. Foul drainage is pumped to the main sewer.
13. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** has no objections.
14. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** has not asked for additional hydrants.
15. The comments of the **Trees and Landscape Officer** will be reported verbally.
16. **The Ecology Officer** lodges a holding objection, stating;
17. "The current site for the proposed lake has clearly developed a biodiversity value as an area of wet woodland with reed and sedge beds. **Policy EN12** should be applied.

I would wish to have further discussions with the applicant and likely require a site assessment. Where would all the spoil generated from the excavation go?

How could the disturbance to nesting birds be avoided?"
18. Further details of plant species required now. Not sure if manure really needed for lake."

Representations – Applicant

19. In a covering letter, agents for the applicants state:
 - The site consists of one single unit and four multiple units of four dwellings, ie 17 units. The proposal will be a reduction to 16.
 - The layout takes into account the conditions of the site licence.
 - The developed site is not being enlarged. The overall site area of 0.6 ha. could allow 26 units, the proposal is therefore half the maximum permitted.
 - The site access has been widened and, with a verge width of 7.6m, visibility is good. There will be no increase in the amount of traffic generated by the site and, in view of the age restriction, movements will not be at peak times.
 - The age limit will allow local property owners to downsize, realize capital for retirement and release housing stock for families.
 - Outside the development site, the overgrown land will be developed to recreational activity space.
 - The site can be drained via the existing pumped system to the main sewer.

- Our client is willing to enter into a Section 106 Agreement restricting the age of occupants to be above 55 commensurate with a retirement house project.
- Since 1992 our client has been unsuccessfully attempting to provide redevelopment of the site with the Area Planning Officer. This scheme should now be given full and worthwhile consideration.

Representations – Neighbours

20. Councillor Mrs Williamson comments:

“It seems to me that turning it into mobile home site for over 55’s has distinct problems. Whilst I don’t consider 55 particularly old I do not feel that such an isolated spot would be good for many of those who might be in their 70’s or 80’s. There is the problem of lack of amenities accessible easily on foot, the A10 is not easy to cross even for the very fleet of foot then there is quite a walk to the village.

I am also concerned about elderly drivers turning out onto the A10 whilst they may drive perfectly safely in the village where speeds are much less I would be concerned about their reactions when coping with the speed of traffic on the A10.”

21. Two neighbours have commented; one has no objection to the proposal but is concerned at the speed of traffic on the A10. They have, over a number of years, witnessed a number of accidents on the road and point out that elderly people wishing to walk into Waterbeach can either do so via a footpath, directly opposite the site’s entrance, which leads into the village but entails crossing the road on a bend, or facing a half mile detour to the “Slap-Up” P.H. junction.
22. Speeds will have to be reduced here if the Denny End Road junction is to be improved.
23. The other neighbour, who lives directly adjacent to the access to the site, has the following concerns:
- i) The existing driveway is surfaced with gravel and cars driving past can clearly be heard inside the house. With the increase in traffic, from residents and their visitors, can we ask that the access roadway be tarmacked.
 - ii) Effect on services; can the drains cope with the extra flow?
 - iii) If the excavated material is to be taken off-site, what provision will be made to stop mud being deposited on the A10?
 - iv) If there is an age limit (minimum) of 55, this does not automatically mean that residents will be retired. As such there will still be peak-hour traffic and, being on a bend, visibility is restricted. With limited ‘right-turn’ facilities into the site, there have been a number of accidents and near misses. Trying to cross the road is a hazard.
 - v) The site is in the Green Belt.
 - vi) At present the site is well maintained but a development such as proposed will scare away the wildlife which would be unlikely to return.

- vii) With the planned increase in the number of houses in Waterbeach, there will be more traffic on the A10 and the Denny End junction. Could the stretch of road from the 'Slap-Up' junction to Denny End Road be lit and have a 40mph limit imposed?

Planning Comments

24. The main issues for consideration are Green Belt, access onto A10, and whether or not site is suitable for housing being outside both Landbeach and Waterbeach.
25. A fourth issue is that of ecology.

i) Green Belt

26. Policies of the Structure Plan and Local Plan, reinforced by Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 "Green Belts", all seek to protect a Green Belt from inappropriate development and to maintain its openness. By definition, a housing development, whether mobile homes or permanent housing of "bricks and mortar", is inappropriate. The two earlier consents for caravans on this site were granted prior to the allocation of this land as Green Belt. Consent for such would not be forthcoming today.
27. If a development is deemed to be inappropriate, the question has to be asked as to whether or not there are any mitigating circumstances whereby consent be granted. Here the applicant is stating that the site is occupied at present as one mobile, plus four mobiles each divided into four small units. (NB. As a result of recent legal rulings it has been established that, unless appropriately conditioned, planning permission is not required to sub-divide a mobile home.) This has resulted in the site being occupied with one family mobile home and sixteen one-bed units ie 17 units. To redevelop the site with 16 will reduce the density.
28. The other argument put forward is that, with a Section 106 Agreement stating that residents will be 55 +, all residents will be retired, and therefore will not drive into, or out of the site, at peak hours.
29. These arguments do not justify consent being granted. Four of the mobiles proposed will measure 6.0m x 16.0m (96m²/1033 sq ft), with the other twelve measuring 6.0m x 18.0m (108m²/1162 sq ft). It seems to me unlikely that units of these sizes will only be occupied by single people. Likewise, even if people are retiring earlier, there can be no guarantee that all of the occupiers, even if aged over 55, will not be working.
30. When an appeal was dismissed in 1998 (see HISTORY above) to replace one mobile with a small bungalow, the Inspector was very firm in his view that this was inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the replacement did not amount to a very special circumstance.

ii) Access

31. Although the access to the site has been widened, albeit without planning consent, it is onto a fast and very busy section of the A10, subject to the 60 mph limit. Whilst visibility to the south is reasonable, the section of road is heavily treed both sides and is rather gloomy. To the north there is an adverse bend.

iii) Suitability for Housing

32. The site lies in the Green Belt, well outside the village frameworks for both Landbeach and Waterbeach. Policies do not permit such developments as proposed in a countryside location.
33. In addition the location of the site is not sustainable, especially as intended, for persons of retirement age. For such an age group, close proximity to shops, a Post Office, and other facilities is essential. As pointed out by one neighbour, there is a footpath, immediately opposite the entrance to the site, which leads through to the village green. The footpath's length is 745m. However it would be extremely dangerous for an elderly person to try and cross the A10 at this point.

iv) **Ecology**

34. That part of the site to be excavated as an amenity area was dug for gravel between 1930 and 1940, - but only down to the summer low water level. This has resulted in the ground level being reduced by 1.0m approximately. Nature has taken over since digging ceased and, with the water table being higher in winter, the site has become an interesting area for ecology. The applicant cleared much of the site in the early 1990's, but there has been much regeneration of tree growth since then.
35. Members will note the comments, and holding objection, of the Council's Ecology Officer.

Recommendation

Refusal

36. Although there is a ribbon of development to the south, and some development opposite, Bluebell Woods lies in the countryside well outside the villages of both Landbeach and Waterbeach – the centres of both being approximately 1.6km distant. The site also lies in the Green Belt.
1. As such the proposed intensification of use would be contrary to Policies P1/2 and P1/3 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (2003) and SE8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2004) which seek to restrict new housing developments to within village frameworks and existing settlements.
 2. The proposal is, by definition, inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore contrary to Policies P9/2a) of the Structure Plan, GB1 and GB2 of the Local Plan, and the aims of PPG2 "Green Belts", all of which seek to protect the character and openness of the Green Belt, together with the setting and special character of Cambridge.
 3. Positioned midway between the villages of Landbeach and Waterbeach, all journeys to and from the site will be by car. Such a dependence on the motor car is not sustainable and therefore contrary to Policy P1/3 - of the Structure Plan and Policy TP1 of the Local Plan.
 4. The excavation and creation of the amenity lake will destroy the present area of regenerated wet woodland. Without a greater degree of detail and a site assessment such loss would be contrary to policies P1/2 and P7/2 of the Structure Plan and EN8 and EN12 of the Local Plan.

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/2128/04/F

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