

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

5 December 2012

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

S/1996/12/FL – GIRTON

Residential development comprising 22no. dwellings with road, parking & associated landscaping for Stepford Homes

Recommendation: Delegated Approval/Refusal

Date for Determination: 21 December 2012

Notes:

This Application has been reported to the Planning Committee for determination because the Parish Council's recommendation of refusal is not supported by Officers.

Members will visit the site on the 4 December 2012

To be presented to the Committee by Matthew Hare

Site and Proposal

1. The application site comprises a site of approximately 0.57ha at the north western end of the Wellbrook Way development near to the main entrance with Girton Road and on the northern side of the street. The site is situated between the existing commercial (office) buildings of Wellbrook Court and a tall block of flats. To the north east is the A14. The site at present is overgrown with scrub.
2. Previously the site was used for cold storage and other similar uses. Indeed aerial photography records from 1988 backwards reveal that the site was occupied by substantive buildings and hard standing. These buildings were clearly demolished at some point in time between 1988 and 1998. Regardless the site is considered to constitute a previously developed brownfield site.
3. The site falls within the Girton Development Framework Boundary the boundary of which runs along the north east boundary of the site. The Cambridge Green Belt lies beyond this boundary of the site also. An Award Drain runs under the north western boundary of the site.
4. The proposals seek the total development of the site to provide a total of 22 dwellings. At this stage seven of the dwellings are proposed to be affordable and fifteen are proposed to be market housing. The mix of the market housing proposed is currently: 7 x 4-bed, 6 x 3-bed & 2 x 2-bed.

5. Planning History

S/1962/03/O – Offices and Light Industrial Workshops (Renewal of Time Limited Permission S/2034/98/0) – Approved.

S/0155/02/RM - Erection of Office Building (Class B1), External Works, Landscaping and Car Parking – Approved

S/2077/99/F - Vehicular Access – Approved

S/2034/98/O - Offices and light industrial workshops (renewal of time limited permission S/0007/96/0) – Approved

S/0007/96/F - Office and Light Industrial Workshops (Renewal of Planning Permission S/0013/93/0) – Approved

S/0593/94/RM - Offices and Light Industrial Workshops (Alternative Access) – Refused

S/2019/93/O – Residential Development – Withdrawn

S/1101/93/RM - Offices and Light Industrial Workshop – Approved

S/0013/93/O - Office and Light Industrial Workshops (Renewal of Permission S/1725/89/O) – Approved

S/0080/93/O - Offices and Light Industrial Workshops (Renewal of Permission S/1725/89/O) – Approved

6. **Planning Policy**

South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy, adopted January 2007

ST/6 – Group Villages

South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) Development Control Policies DPD, adopted January 2007

DP/1 - Sustainable Development

DP/2 - Design of New Development

DP/3 - Development Criteria

DP/4 - Infrastructure in New Developments

DP/5 - Cumulative Development

DP/7 - Development Frameworks

HG/1 - Housing Density

HG/2 - Housing Mix

HG/3 - Affordable Housing

SF/10 - Outdoor Playspace, Informal Open Space, and New Developments

SF/11 - Open Space Standards

NE/1 - Energy Efficiency

NE/2 - Renewable energy

NE/3 - Renewable Energy Technologies in New Developments

NE/6 - Biodiversity

NE/12 - Water Conservation

TR/1 - Planning for more Sustainable Travel

TR/2 - Car and Cycle Parking Standards

TR/3 - Mitigating Travel Impact

Consultation by South Cambridgeshire District Council as Local Planning Authority

7. **Girton Parish Council** - Recommends refusal for the following reasons:
 - The social implications of a lack of green space and back-to-back housing orientation.
 - The orientation of the houses demonstrates a lack of consideration regarding renewable energy technologies.
 - The height of the buildings, particularly the visual effect of the estate to those entering Wellbrook Way is felt to be inappropriate for the estate as a whole.
 - The lack of consideration of non-car transport options and no space to implement the proposed carshare scheme in the transport plan.

“It was noted that if this development is delayed until the road is adopted a far preferable design would be possible”
8. **Landscape Design Officer** – No comments received.
9. **Environmental Health Officer** – Recommends a standard condition regarding the submission of a detailed noise attenuation / insulation scheme for the residential units, to protect future occupants internally and externally from A14 traffic noise.
10. **Local Highways Authority** – Raises no objections but advises that it will not be seeking to adopt the roadway or access. Recommends a standard condition regarding visibility splays.
11. **Environment Agency (EA)** – No objections. Recommends a condition regarding contaminated land investigation.
12. **Drainage Manager** – Confirms that the FRA is acceptable. Recommends approval subject to a conditional requirement regarding:
 - Surface Water drainage scheme including details of the flow attenuation devices to be used
 - A commuted sum contribution towards an upgrade in the maintenance work to the award drain that runs along the boundary of the site.
13. **Contaminated Land Officer** – Recommends a standard land contamination investigation condition.
14. **Anglian Water** – No objections. Requests that the surface water drainage scheme proposed is conditioned to ensure that it is implemented.
15. **Ecologist** – No comments received.
16. **Affordable Homes Officer** – Raises objections due to the fact that the level of affordable housing proposed does not meet the Council’s policy requirement of 40%. Also suggests that the affordable mix could be improved.
17. **Tree Officer** – No objections. Recommends a soft landscaping condition.

18. **County Archaeology Team** – Recommends standard condition seeking a scheme of archaeological investigation on the site.

19. **County Council Growth & Economy Team** – Advises that the Development would generate the following requirements:

Pre-School Contribution = **£27,720** (sought in line with Cambridgeshire County Council guidance, £8,400 x 3.3 pupils generated)

Primary Education Contribution = **£71,400** (sought in line with Cambridgeshire County Council guidance, £8,400 x 8.5 pupils generated)

Secondary Education Contribution = **£66,250** (sought in line with Cambridgeshire County Council guidance, £12,500 x 5.3 pupils generated)

Strategic Waste Infrastructure Contribution = **£4,180** (sought in line with Cambridgeshire County Council guidance. The site is in the catchment area for Milton Household Recycling Centre, for which contributions are sought on the basis of £190 per household, £190 x 22 dwellings)

Representations received from members of the public

20. Four letters of representation received from the occupants of nos. 24, 31, 204 & 280 Wellbrook Way. Raising the following concerns:

- A security breach for the occupants of no.31 by allowing access to rear garden over fence
- Potential for damage to private property owned by no.31
- Under provision of car parking
- Congestion during construction
- Narrowness of proposed footpath to rear
- Concerns for the use of the whole site (rather than just some of it)
- Cycle infrastructure funding

Material Planning Considerations

21. The key issues to consider in this instance are the principle of development including housing mix and affordable housing provision, whether the proposals constitute good urban design, residential amenity for end users, parking provision & highway safety and surface water drainage.

Principle of Development

22. The site falls within the Girton Development Framework boundary and thus the principle of some residential development is acceptable in this regard. Girton is designated as a Group Village under policy ST/6 of the Council's Core Strategy (2007) and as such development is limited to a maximum indicative scheme size of 15 dwellings where it would make best use of a single brownfield site. The site is considered to comprise a brownfield site for these purposes, however the number of dwellings proposed is 22 which does exceed the 'indicative' maximum allowed policy ST/6 as such the proposals are considered to fall contrary to the provisions of this policy.

23. However in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development as enshrined within the National Planning Policy Framework and indeed the Council's

own LDF suite of documents (including local housing density policies) it is important to assess whether a development of this size is sustainable in this location and whether it constitutes an efficient use of land.

24. Girton is designated as a Group Village and thus in pure classification term ranks towards the bottom of the Council's settlement hierarchy. However the Services and Facilities Study (2012) identifies a number of key services and facilities in the village; a small supermarket, newsagents, village store, Post Office and Primary School. In addition the village (and in particular the Wellbrook Way Development) is located very close the City of Cambridge and this clearly enhances its sustainability potential for new developments as clearly residents benefit from the myriad services and facilities provided by the City. The Services and Facilities Study identifies that there is a bus link to Cambridge every 20mins and there is a bus stop within very close proximity to the entrance to Wellbrook Way. It is also only a short cycle ride into Cambridge from Wellbrook Way.
25. As such the site is considered to be in a sustainable location where the Council should be looking to make a best use of potential development sites. In this regard the development of the approx. 0.57ha of site area for 22 dwellings equates to roughly 38 dwellings per hectare which represents an efficient use of land and is in accordance with the Council's housing density policy HG/1.
26. Thus although the proposals do not accord with policy ST/6 of the Core Strategy there is not considered to be any material harm in this regard. Accordingly the application has been advertised as a departure from policy.
27. Where, currently, harm has been identified is in the level of affordable housing provision and market housing mix proposed by the development.
28. Policy HG/3 of the LDF requires that all housing developments provide 40% of new houses as affordable homes. Where this applies to a major development (such as in this instance) the Council will only accept on site provision. Whilst on site provision is proposed by the scheme it equates to only 32% of the total number of units proposed.
29. Policy HG/2 of the LDF seeks to ensure that all major developments provide a housing mix that responds to local need with the specific mix identified by the policy as the starting point. This identified mix is:

40%	1 or 2 bed units
25%	3 bed units
25%	4 bed units

(10% margin)

The development proposes a mix of:

13.5%	1 or 2 bed units
40%	3 bed units
46.5%	4 bed units

30. There is evidence to suggest that there remains a need for affordable housing provision in the district and also for smaller market units and thus it may be that the respective levels of provision proposed are unacceptable. However the applicants seek to justify this under-provision in terms of the schemes viability and this is a reasonable approach which the Government are pushing LPA's to have closer regard to this (para 173 of NPPF for example). The Council has commissioned an

independent assessment of viability and the result of this will inform Officer recommendation for the proposals. It is for this reason that Officers seek for the Committee to allow them delegated powers to either approve or refuse the application pending the results of the viability assessment. The other material considerations are discussed below.

Whether the Proposals constitute good urban design

31. The application site sits between (relatively) sleek and shiny office buildings that were built at the end of the 20th century and a tall apartment block that was built at the beginning of the 21st century. The office buildings have a strong commercial appearance utilising a lot of glass, brick and metal, whilst the apartment building is of considerable scale and bulk and has a more classical articulation.
32. The development proposals a contemporary interpretation of more classical and traditional building types, scales and spans that are found within the district. The scale of the frontage buildings proposed is roughly the same as the adjacent block of flats. In this regard the aesthetic design and scale of the proposals is considered to strike good balance between the appearance of the office buildings and the adjacent apartment block.
33. The development is laid out in such a way that is allows for good natural surveillance of the parking areas and property frontages & gardens but largely adheres to the rules of thumb concerning overlooking and overbearing contained within the District Design Guide. The scheme also allows for a good degree of permeability and connectivity to the remainder of the Wellbrook Way development and in particular its network of green footpaths that run along the rear boundary. Those dwellings that abut this green footpath (plots 12-18) provide active principal frontages to this and thus encourage public use but discourage loitering and antisocial behavior (and other more nefarious activities). The back to back relationship of the dwellings has been criticised by the Parish Council but this layout is required to ensure all of the above is achieved.
34. The development provides informal open space by way of areas of open landscaping and the proposed green footpath that runs along the rear boundary. However it does not provide a defined Local Area for Play (LAP). The Parish Council raises this as a material concern for the proposals. Whilst in policy terms a LAP is a requirement, there is a very good provision of *equipped* play areas in very close proximity to the site as well as an abundance of informal open space (the green footpath). As such it is considered that a LAP is not a necessary requirement for this development and would likely be underused. It would be far better for the Council to secure a contribution to put towards the provision of a facility that would be truly beneficial to the area. For this reason Officers do not consider that the failure to provide an onsite LAP is materially harmful.
35. Having regard to the above it is considered that the proposed development does accord with the principles of good urban design.

Residential Amenity for End Users

36. The proposed development site lies within close proximity to the A14. As such it is important to ensure that end user would not be unduly affected by noise and disturbance from this trunk road.

37. The applicants have provided a noise impact assessment that focuses primarily upon the noise from the nearby A14. In addition the scheme has been designed so that those properties that are closest to the noise source (plots 12-18) are orientated so that the garden areas are screened by the bulk of the units and that noise sensitive internal rooms are located on the rear elevation where possible. The Council's Environmental Health Officers consider that in general the noise and disturbance from the A14 can be adequately mitigated down to acceptable levels by a scheme of sound attenuation including mechanical ventilation to the dwellings and a 2m brick wall to plot 7. However this specific detail is lacking from the application and thus standard conditions are recommended, this is considered reasonable and necessary. therefore having regard to the comments of the Environmental Health Team there is not considered to be any adverse harm to end users as a result of noise and disturbance.

Parking provision and highway safety

38. 22 dwellings are proposed. A total of 34 parking spaces are proposed (excluding garages) to serve these dwellings. This equates to 1.5 parking spaces per unit (excluding garages) which is in accordance with the Council's maximum parking standards and strikes a good balance between parking provision and incentives for more sustainable forms of transport i.e. bus, cycle or foot which is important given the sustainability of the location and the good public transport links to Cambridge.
39. Cycle parking provision is proposed (4m² sheds). The applicant has confirmed that they would be amendable to a conditional requirement to ensure that these cycle stores are delivered prior to occupation.
40. The Parish Council raises concern for the lack of consideration of non-car transport options within the proposals. However the balanced parking provision, cycle stores and travel plan are tantamount to quite substantial consideration for the encouragement of more sustainable patterns of transport. Officers are satisfied that the proposals meet the development plan requirements in this regard.
41. The Local Highways Authority raises no objections to the proposals in terms of highway safety impact. It recommends a standard condition to ensure that the visibility splays proposed for the main entrance are maintained in perpetuity – this is reasonable and justified.

Surface Water Drainage

42. The Environment Agency and the Council's Drainage Manager raise no material concern for flood risk as a result of the development. The Drainage Manager requests a surface water drainage scheme condition which is reasonable in this instance given that some detail is lacking on specifics in this regard. Further to this a commuted sum payment is sought to for enhanced maintenance work to the Council's Award Drain which would be subject to increased flows if the development were to go ahead. This commuted sum would be secured through a S106 agreement.

Further Considerations

43. Concerns are raised by the Parish Council that the layout of the dwellings has no regard to the provision of renewable energy resources. It doesn't specify what energy resources but it is presumed to be making reference solar panels. Assuming this to be the case the applicant has confirmed that it intends to meet the requirements of policy NE/3 (i.e. 10% of predicted on site energy demand by way of renewable

means) through a scheme of solar PV and air source heat pumps. In this regard all of the proposed houses are reported to have a south eastern or south western facing roof slope that would, in principle, allow for the siting and operation of solar PV panels. Officers are satisfied that the proposals are capable of meeting the requirements of policy NE/3 and a conditional requirement would ensure this and is considered reasonable.

44. The Parish Council raises concerns for the lack of space available on site to implement the proposed car share scheme as detailed in the submitted Travel Plan. The car share scheme involves the appointment of a local coordinator to facilitate a car share scheme amongst end users of the site – no physical space on site is required for this as residents would share the use of their own cars for which parking provision is accommodated. As such this does not form a sustainable reason for the refusal of the scheme.
45. Concerns have been raised for the potential for nuisance to highway users during the period of construction. It would be reasonable to apply a condition to agree a contractors parking and delivery plan in this instance to seek to ensure that there is minimal disturbance in this regard.
46. A draft heads of terms has been submitted that seeks to agree appropriate levels of contributions for Community Facilities, Public Open Space, Education and waste receptacles etc. It has not, as yet, been possible to complete a S106 agreement in this regard but this is forthcoming. As such it is reasonable to apply a standard Grampian style condition to secure such contributions in the event of approval.
47. Concern is raised in representation for potential for damage to private property owned by no.31 as a result of the proposals. This is not a material planning matter and would be addressed, if necessary, under civil law.

Conclusion

48. In general urban design terms and in terms of relevant applicable local policy requirements the scheme is considered by Officers to be acceptable. This is with the exception of affordable housing provision and market housing mix, for which a case has been put forward on viability grounds and the Council's is currently seeking expert opinion on this.
49. Should the professional opinion be that the viability argument is sound then Officers would seek to approve the application under delegated powers subject to any conditions deemed reasonable and necessary in accordance with circular 11/95 and para 204 of the NPPF. At this stage such conditions would be:
 - Time period for implementation
 - Approved plans and documents
 - External materials
 - Hard and soft landscaping
 - Surface water drainage
 - Noise attenuation scheme
 - 10% renewable energy scheme
 - Scheme of archaeological investigation
 - Scheme of contamination investigation
 - Contractors parking and delivery plan
 - Grampian condition
 - Provision of cycle stores on plot prior to occupation

- Visibility splay retention

50. Should the professional opinion be that the viability argument is unsound then Officer's would either look to refuse the application under delegated powers or to negotiate an alternate level of affordable housing provision and market housing mix. In the case of the latter it is not considered that this would result in any substantive changes to the layout or general urban design of the scheme that members have had consideration to, thus it is not considered that there would be need to return the matter to the Committee in such circumstances.

Recommendation

51. It is recommended that the Planning Committee grant Officers with the powers to make a delegated decision on the acceptability of the proposals having regard to the results of an independent professional assessment of the viability of the scheme.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy (adopted January 2007)
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control Policies DPD (adopted January 2007)

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