

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee

1st June 2005

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0713/05/O - Thriplow

Residential Development, Land at Lodge Road, for Thriplow Farms Ltd.

Recommendation: Refusal

Date for Determination: 12th July 2005 - (Major Application)

Departure

Adjacent Conservation Area

Site and Proposal

1. The 1.388 ha site is located on the South-west corner of the Fowlmere Road/Lodge Road junction, and consists of a collection of large agricultural buildings, silos, and hardstandings all dating from the post-war period and serving a large local farm. The one exception is the southern most building on the Lodge Road frontage which is used as a commercial repair garage.
2. To the west is arable farmland and one modern agricultural barn, which is excluded from the application site; to the east, across Lodge Road, is the village cricket ground; to the south is The Lodge, a house in extensive grounds; and to the north, across Fowlmere Road is further arable land. The site boundary to Fowlmere Road is screened by a deciduous hedge; the Lodge Road frontage is predominantly open, and dominated by a large concrete apron to the farm buildings, which are set back about 20m from the road.
3. The outline application, received on the 12th April 2005, proposes the redevelopment of the site for residential purposes, with an estimate of 25-30 dwellings. All matters are reserved.

Supporting Letter

4. In a covering letter the applicant's agent states:

"The buildings are large, high and obvious. They are utilitarian and in appearance are more akin to industrial buildings rather than traditional agricultural buildings. They are prominent both from the approach from Fowlmere and from Lodge Road itself, sitting as they do in a concreted servicing area.
5. Thriplow is designated in the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan as an infill only village. That designation is related both to the level of services found in the village and to the consideration of its existing character. Services include a Post Office/shop, a public house, a village hall, a primary school and a recreation ground. In recognising the open nature of the village, the adopted local plan is concerned not to allow any development beyond infill, which would destroy that village character. In Thriplow, some latitude is introduced in policy terms in the adopted local plan (at paragraph 91.16).

There is recognition that *in very exceptional cases, a slightly larger development may be permitted if this would lead to the sustainable recycling of a brownfield site, bringing positive overall benefit to the village.*

6. The village sits within the approved Cambridge Green Belt. The grain store site is not included within the green belt. The western boundary of the application site is a common boundary with the green belt, which embraces land to the west and north.
7. The proposal is for the demolition of all the existing buildings and for the redevelopment of the site for housing. Although an outline application, consideration of advice in the local plan, in PPG3 on housing and of the site generally suggests that on this site of approaching 1.4 hectares, between 25 and 35 dwellings might be accommodated. The exact number, layout and design would be the subject of a reserved matters application.
8. However, in suggesting redevelopment for housing, certain policy requirements help inform the nature of the housing likely to be built. There is a policy requirement that 50% of the housing be affordable.
9. The adopted local plan also gives guidance on housing mix and design in Policy HG10. Housing will be required to contain a mix of units, providing a range of types, sizes (including one and two-bedroomed dwellings) and affordability, making the best use of the site and promoting a sense of community which reflects local needs. Design and layout is to be informed by local context and the wider character of the village. The supporting text of the policy also gives looser guidance on the matter of density, pointing to the requirements set out in PPG3 indicating densities generally of the order of 30—50 dwellings per hectare. That supporting text also indicates that average housing density in South Cambridgeshire (and nationally) is around 25 dwellings per hectare.
10. Consideration of that policy and information suggests that this regular shaped site might accommodate between 25 and 35 dwellings to a layout and design which would enhance the quality of the immediate area, both in its own right and by replacing buildings, which despite being largely agricultural in use, are industrial in appearance.
11. The layout and style of the redevelopment site can be informed by the immediate context. The site is on the edge of Thriplow (albeit outside the designated framework). In the near vicinity is the housing estate on the north side of Fowlmere Road. The cricket ground is opposite and to the south and east, lower density, older individual homes are set along Lodge Road and the network of lanes beyond. Design and layout will need to reflect both the importance of the site on the approaches to Thriplow from Fowlmere as well as picking up on the distinctive characters of the immediate vicinity. Housing will generally be of two storeys although attic accommodation in roof spaces, with traditional dormers, may be appropriate. The housing can comprise a mixture of detached, semi-detached and limited terraces. That mix of accommodation will help achieve a physically pleasing layout as well as offering the mix of accommodation that will help the needs both in terms of affordable and open market housing.
12. The layout and design of housing on the site (which are reserved matters) need to respect its important location both on the approach along the Fowlmere Road as well as the more immediate relationship with Lodge Road. Access may be taken in two, if not three locations, along Lodge Road, each to serve a group of housing.

On that basis, phasing of the development could be achieved if that was felt appropriate. In securing the provision of affordable housing, much depends on available funding to Registered Social Landlords. That may necessitate phasing, which, in turn, would facilitate the meeting of local needs as opposed to needs drawn on a wider basis.

14. The opportunity can be taken to sensitively consider landscaping. Again, there are two aspects. Firstly, the edge of the built development could be softened by planting, both within the site and on the adjacent agricultural land, which is in the same ownership. That landscaping may not necessarily offer complete screening but rather create the opportunity for interplay between new built form and new tree/hedge planting, or both. Redevelopment of the farm buildings will secure a significant lowering in the height of the buildings which are currently on site. In some cases, those are between 12 and 13 metres high. Lower buildings will have less impact, both on the approach to the village and on Lodge Road itself. Landscaping along Lodge Road can help achieve a softer more rural context than is currently presented by the existing grain store. Landscaping can help reinforce informality, which is the hallmark of much of the roadways in Thriplow.
15. Redevelopment of the site for housing can secure significant benefits, including a range of house types and tenure with affordable housing for local needs achieving, if possible, priority being given to Thriplow-generated needs. The replacement of the prominent and sizeable agricultural buildings will secure significant environmental benefits in both visual and noise terms."

Planning History

16. A 1998 application to crush concrete on site was refused. In the same year an application to change the use of one agricultural building at the southern end of the site to a vehicle workshop/MOT station was approved.

Planning Policy

17. The site lies outside, but adjacent to the village framework and the Conservation Area. The western site boundary abuts the Green Belt, but the site itself is excluded from it. Thriplow is within the Area of Restraint south of Cambridge.
18. The following policies are relevant:

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
Policy P1/2 Environmental Restrictions on Development
Policy P2/6 Rural Economy
Policy P5/3 Density
Policy P5/5 Homes in Rural Areas
Policy P7/6 Historic Built Environment
Policy P9/2a Green Belt

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 – infill village
Policy SE5 Infill Villages
Policy SE6 Area of Restraint
Policy SE8 Village Frameworks
Policy GB1 Boundaries of the Green Belt
Policy GB2 Green Belt – General Principles
Policy HG8 Exceptions Policy for affordable housing
Policy EN30 Development in Conservation Areas

Consultation

19. **Thriplow Parish Council** approves the application.
20. “**Thriplow Parish Council** supports, in principle, the proposal for residential development on this site provided that Parish Council views are taken seriously at the detailed planning stage. Parish Councillors make the following comments:
21. The eventual style, character and density of any development on this site should be sympathetic with the whole village and the parish council should be included in discussions relating to design, density, landscaping etc.
22. Landscaping on this site is important. There should be a landscaping belt to the west of the site and the applicant’s suggestion that landscaping could extend into adjacent agricultural land is welcomed.
23. It is hoped that there could be some ‘affordable’ houses for sale that are not held by a Housing Association and that they really should be affordable and not small houses at inflated prices.
24. The suggested density of 25-30 houses on this site is too high and would also result in more extra cars than the village can cope with. Village roads are narrow and not suitable for overflow parking, the public transport service provided to Thriplow is poor and therefore, bearing in mind that most houses now have two cars, sufficient parking spaces must be provided on site.
25. Exits from the development should encourage traffic to use Fowlmere Road and Middle Street to access the A505 rather than Lodge Road and Farm Lane which are narrow, winding roads. There is also very poor visibility when exiting Farm Lane at the cross-roads at its eastern end.
26. The construction of Lodge Road should be investigated to ascertain whether it is suitable to take the increased traffic this development would bring or whether the road needs upgrading.
27. Eventual design should respect the privacy of residents at The Lodge in Lodge Road.
28. Extra pressure would be put on the primary school and consideration should be given to the implementation of a Section 106 Agreement to provide extra funding for the school and also for recreational facilities.”
29. **The Local Highway Authority** comments will be reported verbally.
30. **The Environment Agency** has no objection subject to standard conditions requiring the prior approval of surface water/foul water details and a ground contamination investigation.
31. **The Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requires the provision of fire hydrants to serve the development.
32. **The Conservation Manager’s** comments will be reported verbally.

33. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** has no objections subject to conditions controlling the use of power operated machinery during the construction phase, and a contamination survey. Informatives are suggested covering the use of driven pile foundations, bonfires and the requirement for a Demolition Notice.
34. **The Housing Officer** comments there is no affordable housing currently in Thriplow. A survey in 2001 revealed a need for 40 houses. The situation today is likely to be similar.
35. **Councillor Quinlan** strongly supports the application. He states:
36. "The development of the Grain store site has been supported by the Parish Council now on two separate occasions most recently on 14 March. This view was unanimous including the Chairman. My own inquiries of the people living in the very near vicinity of the site reveals that most welcome the redevelopment for housing and the removal of the existing ugly buildings, the noise from the grain drying equipment and the heavy lorries which visit the site especially during harvest. On the latter point I understand that changes in the structure of grain marketing will mean that this traffic will now extend over 24 hours during the peak season.
37. The overarching planning policy for Thriplow is for "infill and a number of allocations for housing at Heathfield. The majority of the rest of the village is surrounded by Green Belt and this permeates the structure of the settlement notably at Pecks Close and along School Lane. Green Belt designation conveys very restrictive presumption against development other than certain exception such development required for agriculture. Unlike these other areas the Grain Store site is not within the Green Belt and is not therefore covered by these restrictive policies. The adopted Local Plan accepts that in all villages there are previously developed sites which come forward unexpectedly and the development of these "brownfield" sites for housing is generally supported by national planning policy guidance.
38. I believe housing should be restricted to part of the site only. I believe that a significant area of open space should be incorporated probably at the southern end related to the existing ponds providing a buffer to the house to the south. Affordable housing should be provided but only to meet needs generated by existing residents of Thriplow as the Parish has made its contribution to wider requirements at the various developments at Heathfield.
39. If the scheme is approved I shall be looking for first rate architectural and landscape design, the creation of a lime or chestnut formal avenue along Lodge Road (continuing the avenue along the Drive to Bury), a significant area of open space/wildlife habit, significant planting along the west and north boundaries, a "permeable" layout which will allow views out of the village towards Fowlmere Church from the cricket field."

Representations

40. One objection has been received for the occupiers of The Lodge, the dwelling adjoining the southern boundary of the site
- the site is outside the village envelope;
 - proximity of proposed estate development will reduce its amenities because of increase noise and disturbance;
 - Lodge Road is an unsuitable access – not properly surfaced, no pedestrian paths, unlit;

- the local road network is inadequate for a large housing development;
 - the development will increase the risk of flooding.
41. Two letters have been received from local residents expressing concern whilst generally supporting the application
- not enough information to judge;
 - can water supply and sewage system cope with additional houses?
 - site outside village envelope but brown field site of little charm or utility;
 - more affordable houses should be provided;
 - is Lodge Road capable of carrying additional traffic;
 - impact of proposal on neighbouring house to the south (The Lodge).

Planning Comments – Key Issues

- departure from the Development Plan;
 - site and buildings not generally redundant if redeveloped alternative site in the countryside would have to be found;
 - impact on Conservation Area and Green Belt;
 - loss of existing garage business.
42. Thriplow is designated an infill village in the Local Plan and is in the Area of Restraint south of Cambridge, in which housing allocations outside the built up area of villages will not be made.
43. The proposal is to redevelop the 1.38 ha farmyard site with 25-35 dwellings, up to 50% of which would be affordable. As the site is outside the framework of the village defined in the Local Plan, there are fundamental conflicts with planning policy.
44. First, whilst Local Plan Exceptions Policy HG8 allows 100% affordable housing schemes outside village frameworks subject to certain criteria, this is not the case here with the prospect of over 20 market houses in the countryside, designated an Area of Restraint and on the outskirts of an “infill only” village. Policy HG8 does not support a mix of market and affordable housing outside but adjoining villages.
45. Secondly, the site is not redundant for agriculture and serves a large farm enterprise. The application makes no reference to where the current extensive complex would be resited, but it is likely to be on a Green Belt site close to Thriplow. Although buildings for agriculture are defined as “appropriate” in the Green Belt, clearly there would be an avoidable negative impact on rural character and the openness of the Green Belt.
46. Thirdly, the existing garage business operating from one of the barns would be displaced, leading to a loss of local employment. There is no indication in the application that the business would be relocated elsewhere in the local area.
47. Fourthly, the argument that the existing site is visually unattractive is not a material consideration. With judicious demolition, recladding and landscaping the appearance of the site could be vastly improved.
48. Fifthly, the scale of development significantly exceeds infill development and it would not lead to the sustainable recycling of a brownfield site (as provided for in very exceptional cases in the Local Plan). Planning Policy Guidance 3, “Housing”, makes it clear that the definition of previously - developed land excludes land and buildings that are currently in use for agriculture.

49. It is considered the redevelopment of the site itself would be unlikely to adversely affect the setting of the Conservation Area or the openness of the Green Belt. The visual amenities of the adjoining Green Belt could safeguard by appropriate landscaping.

Recommendation

Refusal

50. The site is adjoining, but outside the village framework, consisting of an assemblage of post-war farm buildings partly used by the applicants for agricultural purposes. One building is used as a vehicle repair workshop by others.
1. The redevelopment of the site for residential purposes including market housing would be contrary to the following policies which seek to protect the countryside from inappropriate development and which, exceptionally, provide for schemes of 100% affordable housing designed to meet identified local housing needs on sites within or adjoining villages.
 1. Policy P1/2 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2005
 2. Policy SE5 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
 3. Policy SE8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
 4. Policy HG8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
 5. Policy SE6 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004

The site is not previously developed land in the context of Planning Policy Guidance 3 “Housing” and the proposal does not bring forward 100% affordable housing.
 2. Notwithstanding the above, the redevelopment of the site currently predominantly used in connection with an extensive local farm, would create the need for new replacement buildings in the Green Belt, detracting from its openness and character and therefore contrary Policy GB2 of South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.
 3. The redevelopment of the site would displace the existing garage repair business located in the barn complex, contrary to Policy P2/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 which seeks to encourage small businesses in rural areas.

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

- Planning Policy Guidance 3: “Housing”.
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2004
- Planning File ref: S/0713/05/O

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