

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**S/6286/05/RM - Cambourne
41 Dwellings at Area Gc25, Great Cambourne
for Mca Developments**

**Recommendation: Approval
Date for Determination: 16th May 2005 (Major Development)**

Site and Proposal

1. The site comprises a 2-hectare parcel of land allocated for residential development at the south western end of Great Cambourne. The northern boundary is marked by a greenway, beyond which are further residential sites; to the east is part of site GC18, currently under construction; and to the west and south is an area of dense woodland planting between the Country Park and "golf course" at the southern edge of the village. The site is almost flat, with a very slight slope to the south west.
2. The reserved matters application, received on 14th February 2005, and amended on 22nd August 2005, proposes 41 dwellings and associated works. The layout is now more coherent, following the requirement of the briefing plan by continuing the avenue from the adjacent site to a good visual stop. Two LAPs are now provided and the south western edge has a better courtyard character, including a rural lane style loop road. All matters are included in the application. The mix comprises: 2, two bedroom flats; 7, three bedroom houses; 24, four bedroom house; 8, five bedroom houses. The density is 20.5 dwellings per hectare.

Planning History

3. Outline planning permission was granted for the development of Cambourne in 1994, subject to a Section 106 Agreement. The permission and Agreement required the approval of a Design Guide and Masterplan. These in turn have led to other framework documents agreed between the Council, developers and relevant bodies, against which schemes are considered. These include the Cambourne Highway Design Guide, the Cambourne Play Strategy, the master phasing plan, and the Phase 5 South Briefing Plan.

Planning Policy

4. **Policies Cambourne 1, Cambourne 2 and SE7** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") require development to take place in accordance with the Cambourne Masterplan and Design Guide. **Policy SE2** requires development in Rural Growth Settlements to be sensitive to character and amenity, provide an appropriate mix of dwellings, and achieve 30 dwellings per hectare unless strong design grounds dictate otherwise.
5. **Policy P1/3** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") requires sustainable design in built development.

6. The **Cambourne Phase 5 South Briefing Document** states that the woodland edge character is created by the adjacent dense woodland and rising ground in the country park, and that “development along this western edge should not face out but should emphasise the sense of containment by the use of enclosed courtyard areas. Their arrangement should allow glimpsed views from the main roads, through the courtyards, between buildings, to the woodland beyond. This connection with the woodland could be increased by occasionally bringing woodland planting into the courtyards or other incidental open space within this area. Open spaces along the main vehicular route should be soft and informal with woodland tree species used to create a visual link to the nearby woodlands. Building set back should vary and front gardens should be planted and have picket fences, hedges or occasional low walls to their boundaries.” A view to the top of Crow Hill (the spoil mound in the Country Park) must be retained. Focal points are identified at the end of the east-west avenue running through this and the adjacent sites.
7. The **Cambourne Play Strategy** requires two LAPs (Local Areas for Play) in this area.

Consultations

8. **Cambourne Parish Council** recommended approval to the original plans, subject to restrictions on hours of working and the use of residential roads for construction access. Amended plans: recommend refusal. “The original Masterplan indicated 38 dwellings, this was raised to 39 as originally submitted, the amended plan shows 41 dwellings. This is an unacceptable increase in density.”
9. The **Local Highways Authority** objected to the original layout on the grounds of highway safety, due to straight sections that are too long, confusing junctions, and poorly placed pedestrian crossing points. The amended plans have successfully addressed these concerns. Some very minor changes will be dealt with at adoption stage.
10. The Council’s **Environment Operations Manager** states in relation to the original plans that there is insufficient road access to provide refuse collection for each property; in particular the private drives are too small, the turning head is too small and the walking distance for operatives would be greater than 30m.
11. The Council’s Chief **Environmental Health Officer** recommends a condition restricting hours of work to protect residential amenity.
12. The **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requires confirmation that water supplies are available for fire fighting.
13. The Council’s **Ecology Officer** requires enhancements such as bat and bird boxes, and fence lifting to allow the movement of small mammals.
14. The Council’s **Landscape Design Officer** is concerned that the original plans show tree planting mainly in rear gardens and very little in the public realm, and very little space for planting on the main through route. There is no public open space. There should be a hedge along the whole of the boundary with the greenway. There may be pressure to remove trees from the adjacent woodland in the future due to the proximity of some houses to the tree belt. Amended plans: the planting to the side of plot 32 is impractical as there is insufficient space. Plot 22 has an important boundary with the “golf course” that will need a more involved specification.

15. The **Police Architectural Liaison Officer** is concerned about private pedestrian links from the private drive /courtyards to the edge of the development, which may be used by the public over time and would increase vulnerability of the properties there. Additional security measures for surveillance are recommended. There should be lighting to the parking areas and private drives, although in the case of the latter this may cause confusion as to whether these are public routes to the “golf course”/country park.
16. The **County Archaeologist** confirms that the site has already been evaluated and no further investigation is considered necessary.

Representations

17. None from residents. The applicant has made the following case:
18. “Your letter regarding the original plans refers to “overdevelopment” and to properties being “squeezed in” and an “unacceptably high density”. As a matter of fact this site layout is proposed at an ultra low density by any normal measure. The original planning submission proposed a density of 19 dwellings per hectare and we are currently planning 41 plots over five acres which equates to only 20 dwellings per hectare. This is exactly half the density of sites that we are developing outside of Cambourne and I can report that no other planning offices with jurisdiction over our sites would permit such a profligate and inefficient use of consented residential development land. Indeed, since the publication of the Town and Country Planning (Residential Density) Direction 2005 (Circular 1/05, dated 24th January 2005) “to avoid the profligate use of land” the approval of planning permissions proposing inefficient layouts if less than 30 dwellings per hectare is rendered impossible. 20 dwellings per hectare represents a density of 33% less than the minimum density required by PPG3 yet the Briefing Document to which you refer under the heading “PPG3” states that “Current Government guidance on new housing will apply in all its forms to this phase of Cambourne”. The stance currently adopted in your letter is also at odds with the First Secretary of State’s assertion in his appeal decision letter of 29th June that “the local planning authority has been able to reflect the density set out in PPG3 when granting planning permissions” at Cambourne. Furthermore the “current” density of 20 dwellings per hectare is below even the average density of 24.9 dwellings per hectare envisaged in the original 1995 Masterplan. Although at our previous meeting I agreed to plan some 3-bedroom properties along with many other detailed changes, I did not then agree to provide any two-bedroom properties. On such a low-density scheme to do this would turn this loss-making venture into a financial disaster which I could not get agreement to building. I am confident that the new layout is an appropriate response to the points in your letter.”

Planning Comments – Key Issues

19. The Master Phasing Plan allocates 38 units to this site, and 41 are proposed as a result of negotiations following the submission of this application for 39 dwellings. There is no objection in principle to this number: the application is a reserved matters application so the total for Cambourne is unchanged, and small increases like this have been allowed on other sites where there are good design reasons for doing so. Obviously officers are mindful of the extreme case that there would be so many fewer houses allocated for Upper Cambourne that it could become undeliverable (financially) but also mindful of the requirement of Government advice in PPG3 to provide densities of a minimum of 30 dwellings per hectare (41 units on this site is only 21 units per hectare), and Council’s proposal to add 700 units to the village through the LDF process. Whilst not presuming upon the outcome in any way, it is

clear that the Masterplan is due for review in terms of the allocation of numbers, and indeed work is already underway on this project, for reporting to a future meeting of this committee. Meanwhile Members may rest assured that the overall tally for Cambourne will accord with the outcome of the LDF, if necessary by perhaps reducing the physical size of Upper Cambourne, for example.

20. The scheme has been negotiated to a better standard of design and layout, with greater attention to the enjoyment of the layout of the site by its future residents, particularly in relation to garden sizes and garage positions. In the originally submitted scheme for 39 units, only one was 3-bedroom, and the rest were four and five bedrooms, some also with annexes. The layout was also poor, with most of the houses detached, and little form or character. The amended scheme adds another 2 units, but brings in a greater variety of houses sizes, with more smaller units, albeit only 22% being 3-bed or less. It is considered that this is the best that can be achieved on this site bearing in mind it's medium density requirements.

Recommendation

21. APPROVE reserved matters subject to conditions dealing with issues including landscaping, refuse storage and collection, parking, materials and road surfacing, contractors' compound, construction hours, spoil routes, and ecological enhancement.

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: P1/3 (Sustainable design in built development)

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: SE2 (Development in Rural Growth Settlements), **HG10** (Housing Mix and Design), **Cambourne 1, Cambourne 2 and SE7 (Cambourne)**

2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:

- Residential amenity
- Highway safety
- Visual impact on the locality

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/6286/05/RM

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